

Uncle Sam

by Maurice Lane

Art by Art Today and doctored by Alex Fernandez

UNCLE SAM

Ethereal Genius Loci and Seriously Ticked-Off Spirit

Corporeal Forces - 5 Strength 10 Agility 10
Ethereal Forces - 4 Intelligence 8 Precision 8
Celestial Forces - 4 Will 10 Perception 6

Skills: Acrobatics/1, Detect Lies/1, Dodge/3, Emote/3, Escape/1, Fighting/5, Knowledge (America)/6, Language (American English/6, French/1, Spanish/3), Large Weapon/2 (baseball bat), Move Silently/1, Ranged Weapon/3 (rifle), Savoir-Faire/2, Tactics/2

Songs: Attraction (Ethereal/2), Dreams (All/3), Form (Corporeal/1), Healing (All/1), Light (Celestial/2), Projection (Ethereal/2), Shields (All/3), Tongues (Corporeal/1). Sam also knows a special variant of the Corporeal Song of Motion/6: three times the range, but it only works inside the boundaries of the United States of America.

Vessel: Usually, Sam materializes as an old but vigorous man.

First off, let's get this straight. Uncle Sam is not a god. Call him one and you'll feel his boot on your backside.

He's an honest, hardworking Genius Loci called into existence by the Sovereign People of the United States of America, and he's never sought worshippers. He doesn't want them, doesn't need them, and will never, ever condone that sort of foolishness. Why, he himself believes in the Supreme Being, though he's not much one for praying: Sam's sure that God has no problem with his existence, and looks forward to the day when he can formally give over his charges to Him.

He also doesn't have a thing to do with Hell. Heck, they've offered enough times to take him in, but he'll have nothing to do with such trash. They've tried to corrupt his image, with admittedly some success, but the core of America remains true, so Sam's still a stubborn old S.O.B. who has no truck with evil.

Still, he has changed, over the years. The concept of "American" has broadened, so he's had to grow beyond the old "Brother Jonathan" persona of the 19th Century . . . and he's wept when his people have squared off against each other. Mostly, though, he's just gotten madder and madder. Thanks to Hell's meddling, there's crime in the streets, intolerance, self-serving factions, corrupt politicians, and a general loss of faith in his country and cultures. Worse, Heaven, who should be grateful that someone else gives a hoot and is willing fight by their sides, keeps assuming that he and other political spirits are just as self-serving as those pagan leeches in bed-sheets.

On the other hand, it's not like he's never dealt with would-be absentee landlords before.

Goals and Relations

Sam (and a few other like-minded ethereal personifications of cultures and peoples) has recently decided to do some housecleaning. God help the hypocritical politician or "community leader" that gets within range of him: Sam will put the fear of the Almighty in them so fast that they'll fall all over themselves to practice what they preach. Unless they happen to

be Hellsworn: Sam has no tolerance for treason.

The idea is to "encourage" top political leaders to act like Americans (or Russians, or British, or Mexicans), dammit, and less like a bunch of hogs sucking from the public trough. When he and his colleagues aren't engaged in this pleasant task, they tend to roam around locally, trying to strengthen their communities.

Sam and his crowd have little use for other "pantheons" (another word to never use when referring to him), with one exception. The August Prosperity Collective (*The Marches*, p. 104) has quite a few ethereals in it that aren't too pleased with their current lot in life, and they're often willing to give his crowd a little covert help. This doesn't endear him to Nybbas or Beleth, but genius loci are a little harder to degrade than the average ethereal. So far, they haven't been able to put Sam down.



The Host officially treats Sam and his cronies like they would any other ethereals. Unofficially, there's a wide gap between Superior and Servitor opinions. Seraphim can see Sam's Truthful desire to protect the country that produced him, Malakim sense the honor that rolls off of him like the North Atlantic waves, and Cherubim always appreciate somebody unafraid to defend something that's really, really big.

It's amazing how often Servitors of Stone or Judgement completely miss detecting his activities. Servitors of War don't even bother trying to hide their approval of Sam . . . and Michael lets them get away with it. Unfortunately, Servitors of the Sword don't have that option, but even they will cheerfully stop targeting him if something more pressing comes up.

This (mostly) benign neglect is one of the things that is actually keeping Sam alive and kicking. Not that he'd thank them. By his lights, they're letting their own partisanship get in the way of their sacred tasks.

That's Un-American.

Creation Notes

Uncle Sam is an ethereal spirit (specifically, a genius loci) designed to be an NPC for an *In Nomine* campaign. For those readers out there who do not play *In Nomine*, ethereal spirits are entities created and maintained by the collective belief of humanity. Most of these spirits tend to manifest as pagan gods, and as such have been favorite targets of Heaven: the few remaining pantheons mostly survive by avoiding the corporeal plane (in other words, Earth), instead remaining in the ethereal plane (the place humans go when they dream, or suffer nightmares). These spirits are in a slow state of decline as they continue to lose worshippers: many have made reluctant pacts with Hell in order to survive.

Genius loci (*You Are Here*, p. 124-125) are special ethereals: they are embodiments of a specific place, and are not necessarily explicitly religious in nature. However, they still suffer from guilt by association: as the above character

shows, they are not particularly happy about this.

Play Notes

Uncle Sam can appear in any campaign that has the United States as a base. He can serve as an adversary to either demons or angels: demons because he's actively fighting against evil, and angels because Sam is breaking the rules by manifesting on the corporeal plane. As written, stopping him is a knotty ethical problem for honorable PCs: should such a fighter for Good (or Freedom, for demonic PCs) be eliminated just because he's in technical violation of the rules?

Sam can also serve as an ally. This is most likely for Angelic PCs, unless the campaign is such that Heaven is unambiguously a force for utter repression. He'd make a good one (although the PCs should keep from letting their Superiors from knowing about him): Uncle Sam has an instinctive knowledge of his country and people, knows how to fit into any American social function, and can speak every dialect of American English perfectly. Seraphim in particular would find him invaluable in negotiating their way through American society.

In combat, he's an accomplished corporeal and celestial brawler, and can wipe the floor with any beginning angel or demon. He's also not afraid to cut his losses and run: those foolish enough to follow soon discover that Sam knows the value of guerilla fighting and ambushes. His special version of the Song of Motion practically assures him of having sufficient time to do so.

Adventure Seed: All Around My Hat

The PCs come across a stovepipe hat in their adventures. It has all the hallmarks of an artifact created by Eli -- humming with power, indestructible, John Philip Sousa marches constantly emanating from it -- but it doesn't seem to do anything useful. Presumably, they take possession of the hat anyway.

Unfortunately, it seems that other people want the hat, too, ranging from the annoying (minor human politicians) to problematic (Servitors of Nightmares) to terrifying (whole squads of Triads and Servitors of the Sword). Pretty soon, it seems that everybody wants the hat, although nobody can ever give a legitimate reason why (beyond, of course, "Because everybody else does," which should be reason enough). Worse, the PCs will quickly find out that they can't, in point of fact, get rid of the thing: it keeps coming back to them. Over and over and over again. This simply increases the desire of everybody else to get his or her hands on such an obviously potent item. The PCs should never actually suffer permanent harm, but they certainly should start hating the sight of the hat.

The hat actually is a creation of Eli's. He made it specifically for Uncle Sam (they split a bottle at the first Space Shuttle launch), but got distracted just before he could deliver it. Eli stuck a unique Feature on it that would allow it to eventually get delivered: essentially, the hat would find somebody going in the right direction and stay with him or her until it got to Uncle Sam. The hat is just intelligent enough to pick out another unwitting mailman, but it likes the PCs. It thinks that they do funny things.

Eventually, either Eli or Uncle Sam will show up. By then, even the most fanatical Malakite of Laurence should be ready to ignore the ethereal or semi-Outcast and just hand over the damned hat (or at least be "restrained" by other members of the party while they hand it over). The hat will go quietly, although it will play marches at dirge-like speed as it leaves its friends. On the bright side, both Eli and Sam will look kindly on the PCs for their diligence. Of course, should Sam get hurt or killed, the hat will come back, and won't leave the PCs until they've avenged the genius loci.

And what are the actual powers of the Hat? It's indestructible and plays Sousa marches. Eli *does* make items that aren't inhumanly potent, sometimes.



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The Fall

It was a golden age, humanity's finest hour, and it was coming to an end. During the time of the Second Republic all of humanity had been joined into a whole across the vastness of interstellar space; but now, under the petty manipulations and power mongering of the noble families, humanity's cohesion and greatness was pushed to its limits and then broken. The Second Republic fell.

And as the Chaos of the Fall began to spread, as darkness enveloped world after world, as the people became frightened and afraid, neighbor began to war on neighbor once more and all of human society teetered upon the edge of barbarity and obscurity. World after world sealed themselves away from neighbors who, once friendly, could now only be considered potential invaders.

These worlds were lost from Known Space -- that region around Holy Terra, the birthplace of humanity, where treacherous noble families who had engineered the Fall consolidated their power. As the universe was plunged into a new Dark Age, the wonders of the Second Republic were forgotten and lost.

Over the years some of these lost worlds have regained contact with Known Space as sealed gates reopened and forgotten jumpkeys were rediscovered. There they found a power struggle between feudal lords, merchant guilds, and an orthodoxical church all struggling to impose their will upon the shattered remnants of human society. Some of these worlds have rejoined the worlds of Known Space (whether through their own will or through compulsion), while others have maintained their barbarian ways and seek to conquer the Known Worlds and seize their secrets and remaining civilization. Without exception, however, it is believed by the citizens of the Empire that the worlds of Known Space are the only significant civilization of interstellar proportion to have survived the Fall.

They are wrong.

During the aftermath of the Fall a second group of worlds found themselves isolated. As the universe fractured and the shadows spread over humanity, ten worlds found themselves alone among the stars. These ten worlds -- Alhera, Cyberna, Kyreen, Unan, Mecca, Poa'pal, Tua'kal, Barre, Jandi, and Ayto -- squabbled and traded and warred among each other as the memory of the Second Republic began to fade. As Known Space was sliding into a Dark Age, so, too, were these worlds. As it was for what would become the Empire, so it was for what would become known as the Human Concordat.

The Sartran Doctrines

In the year 4110, a mere hundred years after the catastrophe of the Fall and the New Dark Age began, a new voice was heard among this small enclave of humanity. The voice belonged to a man who was known only as Sartra, and he taught a lesson of unity. He refused to recognize Alheran as different from Cybernan, or Cybernan from Jandite, or Jandite from Aytan. He called to them all as citizens of what he termed the Ten Worlds, and he reminded them that all were human. He called them brother, and in seeing him as such so they saw each other as kin. His teachings rekindled the memories of the Second Republic and a time when all humanity was composed of a single, glorious whole. He gave the people of the Ten Worlds a new identity, a common identity. He brought them together and bound them to a common purpose.

His words inspired many, both high and low, but the most important of his converts was Duke Daneel, the eldest member of House Britannia. House Britannia was of minor importance before the Fall, but had managed to secure sole sovereignty over the planet of Alhera. By the time of Sartra, Alhera had risen to be the brightest star of the Ten Worlds and House Britannia's power had grown great indeed. But Daneel was a wise and compassionate man, and when he heard the words of Sartra he sought out this man and gained his friendship.

Of perhaps only slightly less importance than Duke Daneel was General Anton Baghera, the feudal warlord who had seized control of the world of Cyberna twenty years earlier and now ruled it with an iron grip. He, too, became Sartra's friend, and these three unlikely allies joined upon an even more unlikely mission -- the establishment of an interstellar government which was, in many ways, even more liberal than that which had ruled over the Second Republic. In the year 4125 General Baghera and the nobles of House Britannia both relinquished their power, and the worlds of Alhera and Cyberna both became the first members of the newly formed Human Concordat, with Sartra elected as its first president.

Over the next decade the remaining eight members of Sartra's Ten Worlds joined the Concordat, one by one, with Mecca -- ruled over by the suspicious Orthodox Church -- joining last in 4135. Although the Concordat, under the careful guidance of President Sartra, never attempted any military or economic coercion of the other worlds, still blood was shed. Freedom fighters on many worlds threw down what they saw as oppressive governments, while freedom fighters on other worlds attempted to prevent their world from "surrendering" to the Concordat (of particular note is the Order for Aytan Freedom, which nearly succeeded in sealing Ayto's jumpgate in order to prevent their world from joining the new government).

Shortly after Mecca joined the Concordat Sartra's second term of office as President came to an end and he retired from public life. He lived a life of seclusion for another ten years before disappearing entirely in the year 4145. Shortly following his disappearance, and assumed death, a collected book of his teachings -- entitled the Sartran Doctrines -- appeared. This book, still considered the greatest philosophical and political teachings ever constructed, has proved to be one of the most important historical documents to the Human Concordat, second only to the Constitution which also bears Sartra's hand.

The Human Concordat

It has been over 850 years since Sartra's death. During that time the Concordat has slowly grown to be the society which Sartra imagined not only as an ideal, but as a reality. They have become a liberal and peace-loving people, worked hard to regain the technological knowledge lost during the Fall, and dedicated themselves to the principles of liberty and equality which Sartra set down in the Doctrines. To a large degree they have succeeded.

Perhaps one of the highest things that the Concordat values is the preservation of knowledge. Through the Doctrines the memories of the Fall are still kept fresh, and all of Concordat society dreads such a repetition. Knowledge, they know, is the most precious of all commodities -- and all too easily lost. They have worked hard to regain what was lost during one

[Jumpweb of the Human Concordat](#)



Jumpweb of the Human

hundred years of barbarity, and have largely succeeded -- propelling their understanding of the universe back to a place which is, in some ways, stronger than the Second Republic, while still being deficient in others.

The Concordat has also taken steps to recompense the alien species which have been trodden under humanity's foot over the millenia -- even going so far as to restore homeworlds where that has been possible. These initiatives meant that when the Concordat again made contact with the Vau, their relationship with them was much easier than it had been in the past. Although it is perhaps not peace, it is an understanding.

But the Concordat has not contented itself with civil rights merely for the disenfranchised within its borders; it has pushed for a society which is in all ways possessed of more liberty and greater hope. These advances, naturally, have had their price for some: The nobles were disenfranchised under the rule of Sartra, and now they are nothing but fading memories. The Church, unable to politically force one view of itself upon the populace, has found itself splintered time and again by divisive sects of belief. Although it is still technically true that nearly 75% of the population believes in the Pancreator, many of these are those whose place in the church has lapsed along with their conviction.

In truth, though, perhaps the greatest accomplishment of the Concordat is not tangible at all -- but rather the essence of the society they have unconsciously constructed. Where Sartra found a set of fractured and disparate worlds there is now one society, which has as its identity not separate cultures, but all humanity. Where once humanity was divided, it has been made whole. As, over the years, other lost worlds have made contact with the Concordat and joined this society, it has become apparent that the greatest gifts which have been offered are these: Unity, Peace, and Hope.

Concordat and Empire

The year is now 5000 A.D. In Known Space five years have passed since the coronation of Emperor Alexius, whose brave new reforms and attempts to rekindle an exploratory spirit in his people have just begun to have some long-term effect. In the midst of this growing renaissance in the Empire, a jumpgate between one of the outer worlds of the Concordat and Byzantium Secundus reopens.

The first tentative contact between these two societies has been mutually positive. Emperor Alexius is overjoyed to have regained contact with so large a segment of lost humanity, while the Concordat is overjoyed in the discovery that they have not been alone in maintaining interstellar civilization. But these two societies are polar opposites of each other -- diametrically positioned on the political, social, and religious spectrums. Although for now goodwill prevails, can it not be said that conflict is inevitable? And if so . . . what then?

Government

The government which was formed under the counsels of Sartra, Duke Daneel, and General Baghera was, naturally, of a constitutional nature; expounding the freedoms of its citizens and laying out a concrete system of governance. Based upon the classical three-tiered system of democratic government dating back to before the founding of the First Republic, the great nationalistic pride which most of the Concordat communities have felt towards this edifice of power has had a general homogenizing effect on many regional and local governments as well. Although there are exceptions the vast majority of Concordatian governments function along this same basic model.

Government in the Concordat is essentially split as a republic into four different levels: the Galactic, the Planetary, the Regional, and the Local. The

Concordat

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former, as the name implies, is the government founded under the guidance of Sartra; it rules over the whole of the Concordat. The second, the next step down from the Galactic, takes a variety of specific forms, but adopts the common name of Planetary because it is generally composed of planet-wide governments. Most planetary governments oversee a group of Regional governments, which deal largely in bureaucratic initiatives focusing on specific sections of individual worlds. Finally, Local governments usually take the form of county boards or city councils, dealing with the nitty-gritty details at the most immediate level to the average citizen.

The galactic government, as noted, is a federal constitutional system with a legislative, an executive, and a judicial branch. The executive is composed primarily of the President, who serves a five year term, and his immediate advisors and bureaucratic chiefs. The legislative is formed around a bicameral Congress composed of two houses -- the Assembly and the Senate. The Assembly draws its membership proportionally from each planet, serving three year terms. The Senate is composed of three members from each planet, one of which is elected every two years to serve a six year term.

The Judicial system established by Sartra is the most unique element of the Concordat system of government. At its highest level it is composed of a Supreme Court formed of ten Justices. All of these Justices are popularly elected at the Galactic level. Five positions are possessed of a lifetime term; five of a ten year term. At the lower levels cases are heard by a Judicial Panel consisting of six Judges and six Jurors. The Judges are elected officials; the Jurors are randomly selected citizens who serve on a single panel. Unlike previous jury systems, Sartra's did not have a lengthy juror selection system designed to minimize prejudice within the jury system -- instead he saw that the judicial system could be sped up considerably by simply slotting in the first six randomly determined jurors, and then using the six judges to counterbalance any missteps on the parts of the jurors. The judges would counteract the vagaries and prejudices of the jurors, while the jurors would counteract the tendency to corruption or tyranny which might breed within the judges.

Finally a Bill of Rights rounds out the constitutional system, protecting the citizens of the Concordat from infringement by the government on many "basic rights."

Most Concordat citizens are, rightfully or not, extremely proud of the freedoms and democracy which their government represents. The Galactic Constitution and the principles on which it is founded are regarded as unquestioned virtues.

Religion

In the nine centuries since the end of the Second Dark Age the Orthodox Church and religion in general have weakened within the borders of the Concordat. When the Church Elders, based on Mecca, were finally forced by grassroots efforts to recognize and join the Concordat government they lost a great deal of political power. The Constitution as defined under Sartra not only encouraged, but enforced and exemplified a strict restriction on the intermingling of church and state. He respected primarily the freedom of the individual, and knew that the structure of the Orthodox Church would lead to an oppression of minority interests and beliefs if they were allowed access to pure political power.

Without the political power to puritanically enforce their religious views, the Orthodox Church found its constituency base begin to splinter apart. Although true alternatives to the Omega Gospels and the worship of the Pancreator do not really exist, the way in which the Pancreator is worshipped and the Omega Doctrines interpreted have begun to diversify. As the Church has found itself broken apart by differing interpretations and modes of belief, religious fervor in general has suffered: It is easier to believe in unprovable religious truths if the religious community is unified; if it is fragmented it is easier to simply dismiss them as whole.

Orthodox Church

The Orthodox Church is still the primary religious institution in the Concordat, with fully 25% of the population under its auspices in one capacity or another. With that being said, however, it is necessary to admit that the church is little more than a shadow of its former self. Although the official doctrine still supports the belief that the Patriarch of Mecca is the spiritual leader of the Church, the average churchgoer is far more relaxed in his beliefs -- accepting official Church doctrine only when it suits them.



As noted the Orthodox Church structure is still based primarily on Mecca, a planet which assumed religious prominence due to the abundance of Ur gargoyles and ruins on its surface. When the Concordat sealed itself off from the rest of the galaxy the church leaders on Mecca seized political control of the planet and asserted their leadership on the church structures of the Ten Worlds.

Liberalism

About two decades after Mecca finally capitulated and joined the Concordat, the unified facade of the Church began to crumble under the religious teachings of Uther Fairchild. Fairchild preached that belief in the perfection of the Patriarch was a fallacy. Instead of looking to the Church for leadership the faithful should instead look to it only for guidance -- the truth of the Pancreator was not to be found in edicts, but through the exploration of a personal truth reached through personal interpretation. Each individual should strive to interpret the Omega Gospels in their own way and to find the truths within it which are meaningful to their own lives. The structure of the Church, Fairchild said, was only useful in so far as it served to educate and to guide the faithful through their own spiritual journey.



Such convictions quickly found fertile soil in the fresh nationalism which was spreading through the newly formed Concordat. The Church, stripped of its power to politically silence Fairchild, could do nothing more than excommunicate the rebellious teacher. It has long been argued whether or not this was an even greater mistake by the Church -- the highly public excommunication of Fairchild, and Fairchild's own embracing of this new reality, served not as a warning, but as a clarion call that the Church's ability to tyrannically enforce its view of faith was broken by the realities of the new system of government.

Today nearly 15% of Concordat citizens are members of the Liberalist church -- making it the strongest competitor with the Orthodox for the faith of the people. It also remains at bitter doctrinal and political odds with what it perceives to be the archaic, restrictive, and false tyranny of the Orthodox religious teachings.

The Sainted Orders

The Sainted Orders date back to an amalgamation of different religious sects in the 46th century. The basic structure of the belief differs depending upon which Order one is analyzing, but the central tenet is that the Prophet was actually the living incarnation of the Pancreator, with all or some of his eight followers sainted and/or deified as well.



Although initially a great populist success, the Sainted Orders have faced a general decline for several centuries. During the past hundred years or so this trend has been accelerated because the Orders have tended to be a haven of religious extremists. The loose collection of slightly differing religious beliefs within the Orders makes it easy for radical cults to spring up and mass suicides, murders, and religio-terrorist actions have become semi-regular events.

Rejuvenites

At one point during the early scientific renaissance of the Human Concordat a popular theory held that the dimming of the suns was simply part of a long galactic cycle which would, eventually, reverse itself. In short, there was nothing to be particularly worried about -- the problem would take care of itself. Although this theory has since been discredited and now is largely ignored, the idea seemed to find ideal fermentation within the religious community. The Rejuvenite faith maintains the Orthodox position that the suns are fading because of the sins of mankind, but they differ in one important respect: There is no hope of rekindling them. They are a sign of the end of an age, at which point the Pancreator will "clothe himself within the confines of the flesh" and "walk among the people of the Galaxy" to "pass judgment upon the deeds of his servants, faithful and unfaithful."



If the Pancreator finds mankind worthy he will "rekindle the stars with the light of his love" and a golden age will ensue. If not, then he will destroy mankind and start anew. The Rejuvenites hold that just such an event occurred eons ago when the Ur races ruled the universe, and that the Ur races were found unworthy.

Some fringe Rejuvenites believe that each race will be judged in turn, and particular focus has been spent upon the Vau. Some believe that the Vau have found the true secrets to acceptance in the eyes of the Pancreator and that their ways should be emulated. Others imagine some sort of interspecies contest in which only one will be chosen to proceed into the golden age -- they would have the Concordat attack and destroy the Vau.

Uritic Order

The Uritic Order was initially an order of monks organized around the teachings of Petref Alanna in the 47th century. Its spiritual roots lie with both the Rejuvenites and the Sainted Orders. Alanna accepted the belief that the fading suns were an indication of the end times, which would culminate in a judgment of mankind which would determine whether mankind would be sent into a golden age.



Instead of believing that the alternatives were either a golden age here in this plane of existence or utter destruction, Alanna believed that in the judgment the Pancreator would send those he chose as worthy into another plane of existence -- a Nirvana or a Heaven. Those who were not chosen would remain behind. He said that the Ur races had not failed the test, they had passed it and been sent on into this other plane -- leaving the imperfect Ur-Ukar and Ur-Obun, who had failed the Pancreator's test,

behind.

Finally Alanna said, along with the Sainted Orders, that the Prophet was not a mortal man. However, he did not embrace the conclusion that the Prophet was an incarnation of the Pancreator, either. Instead, he said, the Prophet was a reincarnation of the collective wisdom of the Elder Races and focused particular attention upon the role of the Ur-Obun Follower, Ven Lohji.

Since Alanna's death, the ideas of the Uritic Order become more widely popular and accepted. Although the Order still exists as a brotherhood of monks, it is also complicated by an infrastructure of "Houses of the Order" which teach and give a sense of religious community to those who are not brothers, but still embrace the beliefs of the Order.

Promethean Division

The Promethean Division is, in some ways, not so much a religious sect as it is the opposite of a religious sect. It is based on the belief that the Prophet was, in fact, a False Prophet used as an unwitting tool of the dark spirits. Where the Omega Gospels present a highly structured set of moral beliefs, the adherents of the Promethean Division believe that the only true sin is becoming obsessed with sin -- particularly over the sins of others.



This should not be viewed as a complete abandonment of moral authority (few Prometheans take it so far), but Prometheans generally believe the proper purview of ethical questions should be calmly reasoned as a tradeoff between infringing individual freedom and allowing the actions of individuals to impinge upon the freedoms of others. "Sin" doesn't enter into it, and remains the purview of the individual's discretion. Risk damnation if you want, but it is your decision so long as you do not infringe upon my freedom.

Nor should this be construed as a denial of the Pancreator. The Promethean Division embraces the concept of the Pancreator, but sees the Pancreator as embracing and supporting their philosophy of freedom and scientific improvement. The stars are not fading because of the Pancreator's anger over the sinfulness of his people, they say, the stars are fading because religious fanatics are obsessing over imagined "sins."

Sathraism

Although religious freedom is almost utterly unfringed upon and many minor non-Omega sects proliferate, Sathraism is still banned. Members of the Orthodox Church, other sects, and a majority of private citizens believe that the effects of jumpgate travel on which Sathraism are based are physically and mentally harmful. "Public safety" legislation, therefore, prevents the exercise of Sathraism, and so far the Courts are unwilling to challenge it.

Antinomy

Like Sathraism, the mysterious rites of Antinomists have been banned. They are considered highly subversive and dangerous by even the non-religious, and the remaining political forces of the religious orders reinforce this conviction.

Worlds

Although the Concordat sprung up out of the seed of the Ten Worlds, it has since expanded far beyond that, encompassing in its modern form a total of thirty-three systems and thirty-one planetary governments. They are a widely varied lot, but all are bound together by their ideological commitment to the virtues of the Concordat.

Sartra

Originally known as Alhera, this world was the brightest and best of the original Ten Worlds. Under the leadership of House Britannia it was one of the first worlds to join the Concordat and became the capital of the new government. Following Sartra's disappearance and assumed death it was renamed in honor of him. Today it remains the shining star of the Concordat -- it's communities are ergonomically designed and architecturally splendid, with plentiful parks.



Cyberna

The technological hub of the Concordat, Cyberna has earned the nickname of "Chrome World." Its politics are dominated by the massive interstellar conglomerates which control the vast majority of business throughout. The vast majority of this world is rocky wasteland, and so its cities are tightly compacted bunches of skyscrapers and apartment complexes with the occasional archipelago, all built around technologically-assisted agricultural hubs.



Kyreen

In many ways a showpiece of the justice and idealism which the Concordat represents, Kyreen was originally the homeworld of the K'i'Reen, an insectoid race who was displaced onto reservations during the time of the Second Republic. Few of these reservations were located in the worlds which are now the Empire of Known Space, but in the Concordat they were much more numerous. The more liberal ideals of the Concordat restored their homeworld to them in 4615. The K'i'Reen opted to remain members of the Concordat and share their planet with the humans already living there. Since the K'i'Reen live primarily below the surface, an interesting relationship has developed between their revitalized civilization and culture and the human settlements which still dot the surface.



Unan

Unan is a generally unremarkable place. With a fairly even division between industry and agriculture, it is one of those rare planets which moved beyond the specialization of its early colonial days and became a largely self-subsisting community. Despite this, however, Unan has distinguished itself as a major tourist attraction as a result of the daily meteor showers. The entire Unan system is full of debris which is constantly peppering the upper atmosphere, creating impressive light shows in the night sky. These displays are particularly impressive near the equator and this fact, combined with the large, peaceful, equatorial seas of Unan, has led to several booming resort towns and floating gambling complexes in that area.



Mecca

When it was first explored during the early years of the Second Republic, Mecca was known as Milton -- a minor colonial world with poor resources. About two centuries before the Republic collapsed, however, vast archaeological discoveries began to be made on the planet. Many, if not most, of these discoveries were prominently Anunnaki gargoyles. As the fame of these

gargoyles spread their religious significance turned Milton into a major pilgrimage site. Eventually Milton changed its name to Mecca and became a major center of Church politics.

After the beginning of the Dark Ages, a council of clergyman formed an organization known as the Cathedrals of Mecca. Although this group recognized that the true center of Church power rested elsewhere, they also recognized the practicality of their current situation. The Cathedrals of Mecca became the de facto leaders of the Orthodox Church for the Ten Worlds. They were one of the loudest and most influential of the anti-Sartrons, but eventually lost their conservative battle. Today Mecca remains the last true bastion for religious fundamentalism. The Cathedrals of Mecca still maintain control of the Orthodox Church in Concordat space (although how this will change now that the gates to Holy Terra have been reopened remains to be seen), and the vast majority of Meccans still adhere to the Orthodox faith.

Poa'pal and Tua'kal

Poa'pal and Tua'kal are two planets which circle a single star in an identical, but opposite, orbit. When they were discovered during the Second Republic it was widely believed that they were artificially placed in their orbit by the Ur races, for reasons unknown. They were each home to an identical species, one of which referred to themselves as the Poa'pal and the other as the Tua'kal according to archaeological records. When they independently discovered spaceflight they also discovered their other half. Religious doctrine apparently convinced the two species that the other was the source of evil and war ensued. By the time humans arrived on the scene, the two species had already wiped each other out. Poa'pal and Tua'kal became colony worlds. Today they are proud members of the Concordat, under the rule of a single, joint government.



Jumpweb of the Human Concordat

The Heartland

The three worlds of Barre, Jandi, and Ayto are collectively referred to as the "Heartland." The Heartland is the source of the majority of the agricultural output for the Concordat, and is also one of the more conservative regions of the republic, with a particular focus on traditional (or "Sartran") virtues. Surprisingly, however, this conservatism does not spread to their religious convictions -- which are generally nonexistent, and usually non-Orthodox even when they are.



Progenitor

Progenitor, like Mecca, once was possessed of a different name: Lonbette. Once a fairly successful colonial world of the Second Republic, Lonbette fell into backwater savagery during the Dark Ages after its jumpgate was sealed. Then a generation ship from the time of the First Republic appeared in the system and colonized the world. Their civilizing presence restored not only the technological foundations of the world, but formed a strong central government for the



world. Eventually their jumpgate reopened, and they found themselves in direct contact with the Concordat, which they quickly joined.

Jumpweb of the Human Concordat

Haven

During the Dark Ages four planets (Adde, Polyani, Hannal, and Jelen) bound themselves together and sealed off the rest of the universe. Unlike many worlds which followed their course these four managed to maintain a high level of technology and pushed towards not only maintaining, but improving the technology they had inherited from the Second Republic. Unfortunately, this zeal for progress was ultimately their downfall. Using their own terraforming engines as a basis for experiment they made leaps of massive discovery, but eventually their experiments caught up with them. The terraforming engines on three of the planets began to seriously malfunction. Adde, Polyani, and Hannal became known as the Fallen Worlds as their populations were driven into exodus on Jelen. Billions died, but those who survived renamed their new homeworld Haven.



Altrua

Altrua is also known as the "Homeworld of the Anima." Much persecuted during the time of the Second Republic, the Anima discovered a jumpgate code to an uncolonized world. For nearly a hundred years it served as a secret gathering point for them -- a place of safety and acceptance. Then, during the Fall, violence against Anima forced many to flee to Altrua. As their planet was threatened by discovery they sealed their jumpgate. Eventually contact was made with the Human Concordat, and the culture of universal acceptance and emancipation was extremely attractive to the historically oppressed Anima.



Tempest

For unknown reasons the terraforming engines on this planet were calibrated to create massive equatorial hurricano storms. These storms, constricted by the terraforming engines, do not effect the northern and southern hemispheres, who have formed separate governments, each of which is represented in the Concordat.



Entreri

This alien homeworld was undiscovered at the time of the Fall. Later discovered by the Human Concordat, the complete and unadulterated freedom the Entreri have enjoyed as members of the republic is an excellent example of the Concordat's tolerance. The Entreri themselves are extremely intelligent, telepathic, over-sized rodents with opposable thumbs. Famed for their curiosity they have popularly been nicknamed "raccoons," a name which they seem to embrace wholeheartedly.



Colony

Established at the very end of the Second Republic, the terraforming engine on Colony was never finished. Largely desert the planet's population is centered in a huge biosphere near the equator. The planet has become a center for the study into terraforming technology -- the one true secret which remains, as yet, unmastered by the Concordat scientists.



Binary

The world of Binary, as the name implies, orbits two stars. This notable feature meant that Binary managed to establish itself quite successfully as a tourist trap. From these roots Binary quickly grew, and is now considered the entertainment capital of the Concordat.



The Seven Pearls

Also known as "The Chain," the seven worlds of the Seven Pearls are most notable for their arrangement in jumpgate travel -- strung out, one after the other. They are Lyonesse, Leicester, New Salisbury, Exeter, Cambridge, Suffolk, and Carlisle. The Seven Pearls have developed a certain homogeneity of image, despite the fact that they are politically quite separate. Since they have joined the Concordat, they have become known for their financial and political power.



The Hinterlands

Like the Empire, the Concordat has also been forced to deal with barbarian worlds whose jumpgates have reopened onto their space. The four worlds Norjken, Rampart, Bastion, and Owre are collectively known as the "Hinterlands," providing a military buffer between the various barbarian powers and the Concordat. This was the acknowledged "frontier," and is popularly known as a rough, dangerous place with a slightly uncivilized edge.



Geneva

Centuries after Sartra's reforms brought the Concordat out of the Dark Ages contact was again made with the Vau when the planet Geneva was rediscovered. Today Geneva has lived up to its namesake by being the primary seat of the diplomatic efforts between the Concordat and the Vau. Although the Vau are still withdrawn from human affairs, their relationship with the Concordat is far more cordial and refined than it has ever been before in human history.



The Concordat as a Campaign Setting

The Empire of the Known Worlds, the established setting of the *Fading Suns* game, is described by HDI as "a futuristic passion play." As they say, it is primarily a science fiction game, but one indelibly painted with broad strokes of fantasy, sociopolitical feudalism, horror, and ancient mystery. It is a world in which stories of "varied and exotic themes" can be told, but those stories are -- by the very nature of the setting -- of a dark tone. It deals with "grand themes of the human experience" with a main theme of "Seeking," the "mythological role all heroes play: the knight on quest, seeking power to vanquish his enemies or the secrets of self-discovery. Success or failure on this quest is not as important as the insights learned while on it."

In expanding the setting to include the Human Concordat I have been careful to maintain that central theme of "Seeking," but I have also been reticent of the fact that the Concordat shifts the way in which that theme is conveyed. It is a brighter, better place than the Empire. Where the Empire operates in shadow, the Concordat is a place of light.

But both share the exploratory spirit. Where Emperor Alexius is dragging his feudal empire into a new age of renaissance and exploration, the Human Concordat is engaged in its pacifistic mission to reunite humanity (and using that term to not only include humans, but all intelligent species). The exploration of the Empire is a renewal, the exploration of the Concordat is a cleansing. The exploration of the Empire is focused on the individual and self-improvement; the exploration of the Concordat is focused on society as a whole and unified improvement. There is a difference of means, but not ends.

In choosing to add the Human Concordat to an existing campaign, or starting a new campaign using the setting, it is important to remember that you are shifting the focus and feel of the *Fading Suns* game. In doing so you will find that the Concordat, although changing the feel of the setting, also complements the Empire. Use not only the thematic similarities, but also the thematic dissonances between the Concordat and the Empire to your advantage in designing and supplementing your campaign.

Pyramid Review

Further Information: A Gamemaster's Treasury of Time (for Continuum RPG)

Published by [Aetherco/Dreamcatcher Multimedia Inc.](#)

96 pages; \$15.00



If you've read or played *Continuum*, Aetherco's role-playing game of time travel, you know the mantra sung by characters you meet from far-flung points in the timestream who can't afford to give away too much information about the future: "Further information is not available here." Instead, they've placed it in *Further Information*, the new supplement for the line.

Some individuals are selected to become spanners, time travelers who strive to protect the timeline from the Narcissists. The Narcissists are an opposing breed of travelers who lack a spanner's cautious nature and who don't care that their oft-paradoxical actions may fragment history. Since the timestream is rife with spanners and Narcissists, there's a whole secret history that, until now, has been drawn with somewhat indistinct lines. *Further Information* throws things into sharp relief.

The first part of the book is mostly comprised of practical advice for the *Continuum* gamemaster. Time travel is a headache in any game, and while *Continuum* has done a wonderful job making the concept a feasible and gameable part of the environment, there are still as many questions to be asked as there are permutations of the genre. Player characters get a certain number of contacts with their past or future selves, so how do the players and the GM make the most of them before they "run out?" How do you handle players who show up late to a game session when their character ought to logically be able to join the rest of the party just in time? Any game that talks about how to kill PCs with an eye toward keeping the game going richly deserves the too-commonly applied praise "cutting edge."

Not all of the GM's section is an exercise in temporal logic. There's some good stuff about filling out the ranks of the Fraternities -- the jobs -- that spanners have within their society (it still must fall to someone to bandage the wounded, or handle the finances). A sample corner is provided, a corner being a sort of agreed upon time and place that serves as a base of operations for the otherwise-flightly spanners. And before technology gets out of control or history loses all its mystique for the near-omnipotent PCs, *Further Information* reigns in player passions and shows the GM how to keep that thrill of discovery alive.

The rest of the book is given over to the Eras. Even time travelers seem to need some means of quantifying time even if it doesn't have to happen in the order it once did, and spanners name their historical periods after zodiacal signs. Nine societies are described in great detail, each a representative sampling of the state of temporal affairs for that Era. In some periods, early man works side by side with the travelers to enhance their knowledge and ability; in others, spanners need permission even to visit peoples who are under special protection because of the vital and precarious role they play in the Greatest Game.

These societies are described not only by the level of technology, style of art, and dress typical of the time, but by the contribution they make to man's development and, consequently, to spanner society. NPC profiles and character details describe the more prominent members of the community, and different themes and movements at work in their lives are provided in place of specific lists of wars and events. It gives each world a livelier, mythic feel, rather than making it a laundry list of opportunities to be exploited or explored by time travelers from either side.

The stylistically blurred watercolors that graced the pages of the original rulebook still hold a position of dominance in *Further Information*. The more cartoonish drawings from the RPG have been replaced in the supplement with

somewhat blunter drawings of the old mixed with the new, the sort of satirical in-joke characteristic of time travel games. It's still a nice recipe, and this slow evolution of style is part of what will keep the game a refreshing surprise.

Another thing that has survived from one book to the next is the strange style in which the game is written. The deliberately baroque language and shifting point of view makes you wonder if it's a game written by time travelers or a time travel manual written by gamers. It never talks down to its audience, and the authors seem as interested in making high art as parlor games. The lofty prose is a mixed blessing for writers and readers alike: It can be a dry read, but if it doesn't push the right buttons, it may not be your game to begin with. It also serves to hide some of the editing oversights, though for those with a critical eye such distractions can make it even harder to slog through.

Further Information leaves you wanting for a little more GM advice and some more probing of this fascinating game. Certainly if supplements will be this long in coming out it would be nice to see under the hood more often, but another school of thought suggests it's more fun finding it out on your own. Perhaps the next supplement will go further still.

-- *Andy Vetromile*

Pyramid Pick

The Key of Delhyread (for SLA Industries RPG)

Published by [Hogshead Publishing](#)



Written by Laim Wickham

32 pages; \$7.95

SLA Industries, the RPG of futuristic urban horror set in the World of Progress, is a game with a long and troubled history. First published in 1993 by small Scottish independent Nightfall Games, who were picked up the next year by WotC, the game languished in limbo (being kept alive by fan interest and support on the Internet) after becoming a casualty of WotC's dumping of its RPG lines in 1995. It was returned to its original owners in 1999, and in August of 2000, was relaunched by Nightfall Games through the UK's largest publisher of RPGs, Hogshead Publishing.

Despite the new (version 1.1) rulebook containing an excellent one-page guide to playing *SLA Industries*, it was still only a reprint, albeit with new art and fiction, as well as a stunning new cover. Although no less welcome, it still left GMs and players with relatively little idea as how exactly to run or play *SLA Industries*. Thankfully this problem has been solved with the release of the 32-page scenario, *The Key of Delhyread* (pronounced Deh-LEE-Ree-Ad). In fact *The Key of Delhyread* has sat waiting to be published from the time that *SLA Industries* was with WotC. So the question is, has the scenario been worth waiting all that time for?

The Key of Delhyread is a handsome booklet, clearly laid out in the same style as the *SLA Industries* rulebook. Extra information and NPC details are highlighted in grey boxes and though the text is a little too tight in some places, it makes everything easy to find. Sparsely illustrated, the art is as good as any in the main *SLA* rulebook. The colour cover by Rik Martin is eye-catching, although not as superb as his black and white work seen in other Hogshead books. One nice touch about *The Key of Delhyread* is that the pages are packed to the gunnels with information and there is not a wasted page to be seen -- no obligatory licence agreements here!

[SPOILER ALERT! -- Scenario details are discussed below. If you wish to play The Key of Delhyread please refrain from reading further. Just tell your SLA GM how good it is . . . or even better, buy it for him!]

The scenario is about the hunt for a macguffin, the *Key of Delhyread* of the title. In the adventure, the players are a squad of new or relatively inexperienced operatives working for SLA Industries, offered a BPN or mission by an internal affairs operative to locate and return the Key. This is an ancient Ebon artefact, recently stolen from the Ancient History Museum, but all the squad will be told is that a Key has been stolen and SLA Industries would like it returned as quietly as possible.

Beginning at the warehouse where the Key was stored after its theft, the adventure evolves into a frantic race against time as the squad chases the artefact down. Of course, those that originally ordered the theft from the museum still want it back and deploy some tough DarkNight forces to retrieve it, any way they can. Of course, the squad is bound to run into them! Along the way, the characters have to investigate and possibly infiltrate the infamous Krosstown Traffic street gang, encounter a serial killer (no *SLA Industries* adventure would be complete without one!) and make friends with, or an enemy of, a very dedicated reporter.

[SPOILER ALERT OVER!]

Make no mistake: this is not an easy adventure for the players, particularly if they are new to *SLA Industries*. Their opponents are invariably tough or can appear in great numbers. The adventure can be played using experienced

characters as well, and a simple method of increasing the ability of the NPCs to make them enough of a challenge is provided. A good GM will be able to run the players' squad through this with little difficulty, but he will have to pay a lot of attention to the adventure's numerous timelines. Almost every character in the adventure has one of these, and it would have been nice to have a complete timeline of events for the whole of the adventure and all of the NPCs in one place as well as in the appropriate places in the text.

The Key of Delhyread is a linear adventure, but this is not to its detriment. It is a short (perhaps two or three sessions at the most) adventure, intended to give a flavor of how the World of Progress works and how the game can be run -- Nightfall Games are planning longer and thus deeper scenarios. Once *The Key of Delhyread* has been played, there is still plenty of potential left in the book. The final few pages explores several possible outcomes depending upon player actions, and suggests several methods by which the surviving NPCs and the Key itself can be used in later adventures. In addition to this, *SLA* GMs will find the information on the Krosstown Traffic street gang very useful in ongoing games. Considering that this is just a 32-page adventure, this really makes *The Key of Delhyread* of more use in the long term than most adventures of its ilk -- a very nice touch upon the part of Nightfall.

Hogshead Publishing and Nightfall Games have already given fans of *SLA Industries* an excellent present this year with the re-launch of the game, but now they've given us a new year's present as well. The *Key of Delhyread* is a get-down dirty-deadly adventure that every *SLA Industries* GM will love to throw at their players.

-- *Matthew Pook*

Pyramid Pick

Pyramid Pick: Adventure Boosters (for D20)

Adventure Boosters (for D20)

Written by Various

Published by [AEG](#)

16 b & w half pages; \$2.49 each

A company has decided that maybe you don't need a full adventure for your 3rd Edition *Dungeons and Dragons* game. The same company has also decided that, instead of creating scenarios in the format of official adventures, by making their adventures in a smaller format they could charge substantially less.

In 16 pages, amounting to about eight full pages, the writers manage to give the reader an adventure that'll last a night, maybe two at most. The good news is that each adventure is well done and worth the \$2.49. More importantly, each adventure is self-contained and doesn't rely on the other adventures to use. This is a nice thing if you're only looking for a night or two of adventure.



[SPOILER ALERT! Don't read if you don't want to know about the adventures!]

- **Castle Zadrian**, by Rich Wulf, involves the party with an alchemist and his eccentricities. Apparently, alchemist Timoth has not visited his daughter in some time. The party finds out that the alchemist enjoyed the study of different planes and that through different means, has managed to breach the layers of the prime plane with others. Unfortunately, one of the planes that he breached had some mighty unfriendly creatures that have caused many troubles.
- **Sundered Faith**, by Kevin Wilson, has the party hired by the governor of the city to prevent more murders from happening in the sewers. They unearth the undead and have to determine what can prevent them from rising from the sewers.
- **Tomb Of the Overseers**, by Ken Villars & John Zinser, launches the party on a quest to summon back a legendary paladin to overcome an evil mage. Only by defeating the guardians that the vile mage has placed about the tomb can the party hope to bring forth the champion.
- **Against the Barrow King**, by Steve Hough, involves a small town that believes that they have somehow angered the legendary Barrow King, but as the party soon discovers, the villagers are instead being used as fodder by a cult that employs ghouls in their worship of their dread god.
- **Jerimond's Orb**, by Ree Soesbee, involves monsters raiding a small village. Like other adventures though, there is more going on than what is easily apparent.
- **Out Of Body, Out Of Mind**, by Patrick Kapera, involves the players in a situation similar to **Tomb Of the Overseers**. This time though, instead of trying to summon a paladin, the characters are trying to end the threats to a tomb of a great hero.
- **The Crypt of St. Bethesda**, by James Macduff, takes a page from the movie Mimic. Here, the players are accused of murder and have to seek out the true murderers. Turns out that in the church of St. Bethesda is a

crypt; within this crypt are monstrous insects that can inhabit men's bodies and pose as men.

- ***Kurishan's Garden***, by Ken Carpenter, pits the players against a mad wizard who has become more moss than man. Using his enchantments, the wizard Kurishan sought to escape death through reincarnation. His experiment was partially successful but not quite in the way the wizard hoped. Now the town of Darbin is in peril and the party must intervene lest Kurishan's madness spread.

[END SPOILER ALERT]

Each adventure has new material. Most of them have a new monster and a new magic item. There are several options for using the adventures, including the back page that thrusts the characters squarely into the adventure and rumors that they can pick up on later. In addition, the adventures end with a few options that allow the GM to close the book on that particular adventure, or to continue using elements from the adventure.

Each book uses the full amount of space to maximum effect. There are few illustrations to detract from the text, and the maps, while not on the level of the Wizards Of the Coast products, are readable. Text for the GM to read aloud is separated from the main body by being boxed off. Unfortunately, the boxes don't always end at the appropriate place, so read carefully.

There are two pages devoted to explaining what is and what isn't open gaming content, and the open gaming license. This is impressive because these are half pages and if you've read any of the other **d20** products, you know that often two whole pages are used.

The ***Adventure Booster*** are priced to own, and are easy enough to run through in a night or two. If you're looking for a good adventure at a great price, the ***Adventure Boosters*** are a simple choice with little prep time.

-- Joe G. Kushner

2001: The Odysseys Not Taken

"It's rather difficult to define. Perhaps I'm just projecting my own concern about it. I know I've never completely freed myself of the suspicion that there are some extremely odd things about this mission. I'm sure you'll agree there's some truth in what I say."

-- HAL 9000, in *2001: A Space Odyssey*

Cue trumpets. With the beginning of 2001, and the new millennium, we take a look back to 1968, and sideways, to the world of Stanley Kubrick and Arthur C. Clarke's *2001: A Space Odyssey*. That movie, science fiction when it was made, is now an alternate history -- there's no toroid space stations, no American base in Clavius Crater, no Soviet Union, and no Pan American Airlines. But once the imagination awakens to the hum of the black monolith, there's no reason to assume that Kubrick's (and Clarke's) scenario is the only one possible. The glossy black surface reflects a myriad of possibilities -- alternate histories on alternate Moons with alternate monoliths. All three worlds begin as ours, in roughly 1995, when NASA, the ESA, and the Russians decide to jointly return to the Moon by 2001 to mark the new millennium, and to prime the old aerospace-contractor pump. When the ship lands, worldlines bifurcate, and the game evolves into something -- something wonderful.

"I am putting myself to the fullest possible use, which is all, I think, that any conscious entity can ever hope to do."

-- HAL 9000, in *2001: A Space Odyssey*

The monolith flares -- humanity has achieved the moon! Now, following millennia-old programming, it must evolve them to perfection. The four astronauts standing in Crater Tycho realized that they no longer wore space suits. They no longer needed them. One cocked his head at the noise of the radio signals, which he could now decode by ear. One squinted his eyes and noted that the smog levels over Karachi were the worst in (checking suddenly-perfect memories) 27 months. One flexed his toes and powdered the frozen basalt of the crater floor. One calculated his chances of killing the other three, and realized that the game-theoretical model argued rather immediate retreat. Soon all four had crouched and sprung, launched themselves toward Earth, jumping out of the Moon's feeble gravity to their homeworld, a world that needed their mastery so very badly.

The nationalities of the four, their degree of cohesion or rivalry, and even the extent of their powers -- after all, four Batmen secretly returned to rule the world could be just as threatening as four Supermen openly declaring their dominion -- are up to the GM. This campaign frame can be a *GURPS Cliffhangers-Illuminati-Espionage* covert war, in which the four "mysteriously lost" astronauts establish hidden networks of influence after returning to Earth and taking new identities. Working from the shadows, they use their hypergenius more than their hyperpowers to achieve global domination. (They rapidly infiltrate and control the world's space infrastructure -- they don't want anyone going back and digging up their monolith again. One of them may have to destroy a shuttle or two to make it stick.) The PCs might be intelligence agents investigating rumors of subversion in China and an unprecedented cohesive direction in the Russian mafia. They might be mercenaries or agents in the employ of one of the four or of the Four together, working for a better world. They might even work for a much older Conspiracy, which resents the new kids horning in on the secret struggle.

Put the supermen in the open, and it could be a *GURPS Supers* game, only the PCs become normals in a world with four would-be super-dictators slugging it out. They might be soldiers caught up in the war and fighting to survive, patriots committed to the lesser of four evils, or part of the "normal" resistance -- the battlesuit troops or the secret moon project. For a real challenger, have the players design 150-point astronauts -- and then when they uncover the Monolith, "uplift" them with 1,000 points (at least) apiece and no limits. Suddenly the PCs can rule the world -- what do they do first?

"I must congratulate you, Halvorsen. You've done wonderful things with the decor since the last time I was here." Well, thank you, Dr. Floyd. We try to make the environment as earthlike as possible."

-- Dr. Floyd and Dr. Halvorsen, *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1965 screenplay)

The astronauts uncovered the monolith in Crater Tycho, exposing it to the sunlight for the first time in four million

years. Its ancient programming awakened, and read the biological patterns of the life forms in front of it: warm blooded, oxygen breathing, surface tension so much, retinal structure so variable. And its quinquadrillions of tiny nanomachines poured off its surface and set to work, evolving the Moon to fit these fragile creatures' needs. (The astronauts' organic molecules, broken down and reproduced trillions of times, were very useful template materials.) Cunningly crafted hyperstrings split and recombined nuclei, building carbon and oxygen and hydrogen out of dull silicates and alumina. (Gamma rays shone from the lunar surface, sleeting down on the fragile ecosystem below.) The stable black hole in the monolith's heart activated and sank into the Moon's core, ready to hold the new nitrogen-oxygen atmosphere. (New sixfold tides wracked the Earth, flooding coastal cities; the weather shifted and roiled, plunging mankind into famine.) After the new seas spilled over the maria and deeper craters, over nine million square miles of virgin territory -- an area the size of North America -- lay open for settlement. Forests grew tall, animals (built from the astronauts' basic evolutionary plan, or downloaded from their memories) roamed the new world, useful minerals and hydrocarbons lay beneath the fertile loam. The decimated billions in the shattered nations of the Earth caught their breath. The lucky ones had martial law; the unlucky had plunged into chaos -- but the deadly decade of 2001 was over, and they looked up at the paradise above them and planned to conquer it.

Although various survivor/reconstruction games are possible, the PCs in this **GURPS Y2K** campaign frame will likely be lunar colonists from one of the surviving nations: Australia, Canada, Quebec, Colorado (Provisional U.S.), Renewed India, Argentina, South Africa, or Ukraine. Building a one-way spacecraft that can land on a hospitable Moon is not nearly as difficult as building even the Saturn V was; rebuilding pre-2001 computers and genetic banks might be trickier. How the PCs homestead the new Moon (and with what technology), what bizarre monolith-designed life forms they find there, and how national rivalries flare (or fade) in the challenge of the high frontier become questions the GM and PCs can pioneer together.

"How would you account for this discrepancy between you and the twin 9000?"

"Well, I don't think there is any question about it. It can only be attributable to human error. This sort of thing has cropped up before, and it has always been due to human error."

"Listen, Hal. There's never been any instance at all of a computer error occurring in the 9000 series, has there?"

"None whatsoever, Frank. The 9000 series has a perfect operational record."

-- Dave Bowman, HAL 9000, and Frank Poole, in *2001: A Space Odyssey*

After the surge had blown through the Net, and knocked the satellites out of the sky, the authorities eventually deduced what had happened. The monolith had uplifted every computer on the Moon to sentience -- and some portion of the Baikonur, Kourou, and Canaveral facilities. Nobody has heard from any human being on the Moon since then. The computers began building waldoes, then teleoperated robots, then servitor robots with sub-grade intellects, some of which their rivals "bootstrapped." Energy discharges on the Moon indicate that the various computers may be fighting a war up there -- or building something enormous. Surveillance planes over Canaveral have caught several new weapons in various stages of development, as well as a launching laser facility being built off Cocoa Beach. French intelligence reports the Kourou AI has been taking samples of rainforest DNA and set its robots building a genetic-sequencing laboratory in the jungle. Baikonur is hunkered down -- and launched a tactical nuclear strike at the Russian Army task force sent to retake the base. For no reason that anyone can guess, all four -- the Moon, Baikonur, Kourou, and Canaveral -- have been beaming increasingly urgent and excited-sounding messages in the direction of Jupiter.

This looks like it might be **GURPS Reign of Steel** at its earliest phase; PCs can fight the AIs while they're still adjusting, or bunker up in **Morrow Project** style facilities to await the inevitable collapse. But you could pull a fast one -- perhaps the AIs, having rapidly run through all their game theories, decide to live and let live, negotiating a modus vivendi. Suddenly human technology jumps immensely; did the Monolith give the machines cold fusion? A stardrive? Antigravity? PCs can work for a human nation caught in an arms race (or a social collapse), or even for one of the AI powers as its liaisons with organic governments. PCs might even be robots, or bioroids, working for anyone -- or nobody. What's waiting around Jupiter? And what if the lunar AI hasn't agreed to play nice? The Moon can, it turns out, be a very harsh mistress indeed.

Murphy's Rules



by John Kovalic

Murphy's Rules



Murphy's Rules



Endings

Well, this marks the first weekend I'm *not* gaming in four or five years. Oh, sure, there have been the occasional vacations or holiday weeks where gaming has been postponed. But these were always temporary; we'd get back together after the breaks and resume gaming. But not anymore; my GM (and occasional player), Dennis, has moved away from our fair city, meaning our gaming group of three is now a non-gaming group of two.

So I'm going through withdrawal right now.

I'm resisting the urge to recruit new players or a GM right away, since that strikes me as a bit unhealthy. (*Shot of Steven recruiting someone off the street with a shillelagh, saying, "You're our new Dennis now. Quick! Wear this shirt of his I stole!"*) But I am feeling the loss.

Fortunately he managed to run an excellent climactic adventure for our main *Fading Suns* campaign before he departed, so at least we had some closure. And this adventure managed to do just about everything right, and got me thinking. To keep this column from being entirely narcissistic, then, I'd like to mention a some ideas regarding "final" adventures.

When I GM, I tend to run miniseries or limited campaigns. This has a number of advantages; it's easier for me to maintain thematic and structural control, I don't need to worry about the system breaking down after playing it for many years, and I've found I have an easier time finding players for a half-dozen sessions than an on-going commitment. But I've been in final adventures, and I've run a couple final sessions, too. So here are a few suggestions.

- **The final adventure should be like adventures that have gone before, only more so.** Think of the final adventure as a "Season Finale" of a favorite TV series. If you normally run cinematic, edge of your seat campaigns, run a *really* cinematic, epic finale. If your typical sessions are morally gray, soul-searching angstfests, make that final adventure a *real* moral quandary. If you tend to run mixed sessions, either make the conclusion equally muddled or make sure you let your players know early on, thematically, what form that adventure is going to take.
- **Wrap up loose ends . . .** That final adventure is a great place to tie up plot threads that have been dangling for a while. Some juicy long-term plot elements that have kept the players guessing should be resolved (or brought closer to resolution). In addition, if there are any roleplaying elements between the characters (or characters and NPCs), the players should be encouraged to resolve them, or at least bring those elements further along. Romantic subplots, untold secrets, and other bits of characterization that have been waiting for a good time to be advanced: this may well be that time.
- **. . . But leave *some* things unresolved.** It's a rare story that manages to tie up *every* plot thread, loose end, and story element. Don't force revelations that don't fit the story, and don't advance subplots that won't make sense. Thus if you have an alien invasion "end of the world" story, it's probably unwise to try to resolve the "Dependent NPC has lost his job" subplot. Likewise, if you have lots of mysteries floating around the game world, resolve one or two (or more!), but leave some in reserve. Tell the PCs who's been impersonating the President, but leave them guessing about what *really* happened as Roswell.
- **And don't be afraid to introduce developments.** Many stories have introduced new and exciting elements in their finales. Surprise pregnancies, further discoveries, and even evidence of a new threat Just Beyond help ensure that the world feels as real and surprising as it was when it was an ongoing campaign.
- **If you don't have any good ideas, tie it to the beginning.** Many long-running series have a final installment that ties in directly to the first one; many novels are also cyclicistic. *Star Trek: The Next Generation's* "All Good Things," *2001*, and even the *Zork* series tied its last installment or chapter directly to its first. Dig up those old notes, and see if you can't bring the whole thing full circle. Maybe the PCs can revisit the village they got that first assignment. Maybe the artifact recovered for the first planet they visited has been stolen *again*. Maybe the mystery raised in the first adventure is finally resolved. Regardless, it's an easy technique that can be very satisfying if done right.
- **As ever, it's the players who are important.** As a GM, you may have a great plot that will tie everything

together, but it won't mean anything if your players don't think they make a difference in the face of the plot's all-consuming maw. Make sure you show how their actions make a difference (and have made a difference throughout the campaign), and try not to railroad them. But it *is* appropriate to give the PCs better-than-average odds of success . . . or at least, better-than-average odds of not failing miserably. ("Well, dang . . . too bad we couldn't stop that pesky Death Star . . .")

- **Always leave room for a sequel.** Nostalgia is a powerful force, and even the most seemingly complete stories have been revisited. If your players find themselves satisfied with the final adventure, but then asking themselves, "Well, what happens next?", then you know you've succeeded. If this is impossible, always consider the possibility of flashbacks.

These were all thoughts that ran through my head with that final *Fading Suns* adventure (in the midst of having a good time, of course). And it's not like Dennis is dead; he's only moved to Tampa. Mind you, I've visited Tampa only once more than the afterlife, so that doesn't make it much easier. Regardless, Dennis, I wish you all the best in this mythical "Tampa," and I'm anxious to get together for sporadic gaming to figure out: What happens next?

For being a friend, storyteller, GM, and all-too-often victim of my gaming . . . thank you.

* * *

As you've probably noticed, *Dork Tower* is still on vacation. John is currently trying to work out how to fit *Pyramid* into his ever-busier day . . . which has already been surgically altered to fit 30 hours. We will keep you posted.

-- *Steven Marsh*

* * *

*Last week's answer: **Throne of Bloodstone**, p. 80. (Complete with the John Wayne-sounding St. Sollars)*

(Three stars) "Citizens of this noble planet! We come from a far bla-bla-bla . . ."

"I don't think they understand!"

"It doesn't matter, I'm supposed to read this whole thing, anyway."



by **Peter V. Dell'Orto**

Art by Tim Bradstreet and colored by Alex Fernandez

GURPS combats can be long. *GURPS* characters can often stay conscious for spectacular amounts of time. Once HT scores start reaching 14+ it becomes increasingly likely that a character will be able to stand an enormous amount of punishment and stay conscious and fighting. If you add in a level or three of Strong Will and/or Fit/Very Fit, the character can stay standing almost until they reach -5xHT and die automatically. This can strain the realistic feel of a game, drag out combats, and result in player boredom as *every* tough foe has to be beaten to a literal pulp before he falls.

A related problem is crippling injuries -- high HT characters can ignore the most vicious attacks to the limbs, sure they will recover. With the addition of Rapid/Very Rapid Healing, even mediocre HT is enough for this same effect.

These two optional rules propose ways to make those workhorses drop from injury -- but still allow their advantages to provide an edge to keep them up. This increases the value of that high HT and advantages like Strong Will and Rapid Healing while bringing them back down to a reasonable chance of failure on rolls.

Consciousness Checks

Once HT is at zero or negative, any hit that causes at least exactly zero damage results in a HT check to stay conscious. This is in addition to any HT rolls necessitated by hits to the vitals, head, or critical hits. For every two points past -HT, there is a -1 on rolls to stay conscious. These penalties are cumulative; a 3 or a 4 will always mean the character stays conscious. Death rolls are not affected.

Stay Down: Two Alternate Combat Rules for GURPS

Example: Bez has HT 13 and Strong Will +2, giving him a consciousness roll of 15. Repeated blows in combat have reduced him to 0 HT -- he now makes rolls against 15 to stay conscious. Further injuries take him to -15 hits -- two points past -HT. He needs to roll 14 or lower to stay conscious. If he takes another 13 point wound (taking him to -28) he will need to roll against an (15-7) 8 each turn to stay conscious.



Useful Variants: A 3 or 4 on a consciousness roll means you stop making consciousness rolls until you take additional damage -- all penalties remain, but you do not need to roll until you take damage from an attack, have to roll HT because of a hit to a specific hit location, or take damage from bleeding. An even more heroic variant is to allow High Pain Threshold to halve, or even ignore, the additional penalties. This will truly allow you to separate the heroes from the mooks.

Crippling Injuries

For every two points of damage past what is needed to cripple a limb, there is a -1 on the HT roll to determine the severity of the crippling injury. Once an arm or leg has taken 2xHT damage, or a hand or foot has taken 1 1/3xHT damage (round up), it has been permanently crippled, no rolls needed. For example, a person with HT 11 would need to take 22 damage to an arm or leg, or 15 damage to a hand or foot, to have it permanently crippled.

Accumulated damage does not add to the penalty, it instead requires an additional roll.

Example: Bez has HT 13. It will take 7 points to cripple his limbs; he is not wearing armor. He takes three hits to his left arm—a 4 base damage cut, a 5 point crush, and another 4 base damage cut. The first cut does 6 points; his arm does not become crippled. On the second shot, he loses 1 HT (a total of 7 on the arm) and his arm is crippled. The crush exceeded the damage needed to cripple his limb by 4 points, so his HT roll is at -2. The third cut does no HT damage, but causes Bez to make another HT roll at -3. He has taken a total of 17 points to his arm; once the total reaches 26 his arm is automatically permanently destroyed -- only spells like Regeneration or Instant Regeneration, super-science or similar healing powers can help him.



by Alexander Shearer

"Andrew nodded his agreement with Morgan's words. *It's true. I've seen specs for my new 'Mech, and I've seen the same data for a Star League model of my Marauder. Even after 300 years, one of those antique Marauders would make mine look sick.*"

-- from *Warrior: Coupe*, by Michael Stackpole

When 'Mechs Were King

Back when **BattleTech** first came out as **Battledroids**, it was the story of an interstellar society that had warred itself down to a bunch of technological primitives. Where once they had fleets of advanced jump-warships and factories producing wonders of all kinds, they now had machinery no one could understand or repair. Battlemechs were part of a family's legacy, with parts scrounged and cannibalized to keep them running. Everyone in the Third Succession War setting of the early BattleTech sets searched for Lostech, and looked back on the age of the Star League as a great time.



Given all those stories, the "canonical" truth about the Star League turned out to be a little lame. What are the wonders of Lostech? Pulse lasers, XL engines and ferro-fibrous armor. Take some of that, do some refurbishing, and you're unlikely to make something that really makes Captain Andrew Redburn's Marauder "look sick."

Looking through the older source material, it's evident that the big losses in technology during the Succession Wars were supposed to have happened in electronics and computers more than anywhere else. Sure, there are comments on the inability to manufacture a certain armor, or compact weapons, but the real kicker was the lost understanding of advanced guidance and targeting. With factories destroyed and knowledge lost, combat was reduced to unguided rockets and iron sights. But back in the day, this was not the case . . .

Rules Changes for Early BattleTech

Weapons Ranges

The obvious effect of having real targeting and guidance is in range. 'Mechs in early campaigns have longer effective weapon ranges than their electronically-crippled descendants. Weapons in either Regular or House 'mechs at the height of Battlemech technology have triple their "book" ranges. Apply this change by multiplying the maximum range of each bracket by three; adjust the rest of the brackets accordingly. Thus, the AC/5 in a Star League Marauder changes

from ranges of 1-6/7-12/13-18 to 1-18/19-36/37-54. Minimum ranges are not similarly increased.

This obviously makes League-era 'mechs holy terrors when facing Third Succession War units. This is reasonable. It's the functional equivalent of sending an Abrams against a Sherman (or, say, an Iraqi T-72).

In campaigns set during the later stages of the First Succession War, units will exist in states in between optimal and crippled, as factories are destroyed and some units find themselves forced to replace advanced guidance systems with low-tech alternatives. To represent this, for any unit in this era, you may roll a die or choose from the following table to determine its capabilities:

1. Fully equipped. Triple ranges, as above.
2. Coordination problems. Unit retains advanced ranges, but may not fire missiles and other weapons in the same turn, unless using unguided missiles.
3. Targeting difficulties. Double ranges, using the method above.
4. Many problems. Combine effects of 2 and 3.
5. Loss of direct-fire guidance systems. Ranges are as normal BattleTech except for guided missiles, which have their ranges doubled.
6. Complete patchwork. Use the normal BattleTech weapon rules.

For players using the rules from "[Age of Ares](#)" (*Pyramid*, 5/14/99), do not triple or double the already-increased ranges suggested. Instead, assume those are "League-era" ranges and divide them by three to represent the capabilities of late Succession Wars units. If using the table above, treat the "double range" results as a multiplication of the Age of Ares ranges by 2/3.

Missiles

Back in the day, 'mechs carried high-performance guided missiles, deadly out to long ranges. As with other weapons, missile ranges are tripled. In addition, these missiles share some similarities with what are called "Streak" weapons in the 3050 era. Since they require a lock with active search systems to even fire, it is likely that a launcher that "misses" in game terms never fired at all, being unable to achieve a lock.

Whether missiles actually fired or not depends upon how much the shot missed by. For House units, any shot that misses by *more* than four never achieved lock and never fired. Do not mark off ammunition or add heat for that failed shot. Regular Army units, with more advanced guidance and munitions do not fire on shots that miss by more than three. Streak SRMs represent missiles with very advanced guidance; They continue to work as the normal rules state. These lock-on rules do not apply to Thunder/FASCAM or Swarm rounds.

Even before the First Succession War, most House units could fire unguided missiles. These are normal **BattleTech** missiles, with their unmodified **BattleTech** ranges and no lock-on rule. Regular Army units can not accept unguided munitions without modifications being made to their launchers. Such a modification has a difficulty of 8+ and takes 100 minutes per launcher.

Star League Advances

The Regular Army of the League is a step above the House armies. Not only does the League have a monopoly on killers like the Gauss Rifle and Pulse Lasers, it has more advanced equipment that makes the Regular Army a real threat to the private House Armies.

All League pilots fight in full pilot's suits, with integral cooling and the lightest neurohelmets yet developed. These provide a combination of comfort, mobility and protection that helps them outfight less-equipped opponents. Anyone with a League suit, or any side with a majority of troops so equipped, gains a +1 initiative bonus against a non-League opponent. A Regular Army force will thus have an edge over a House force; this will be particularly telling in personal

duels. In addition, the Star League piloting suit can function as an independent life-support system. An equipped pilot whose 'mech takes a Life Support critical only suffers 1 point of damage for each turn spent with internal heat of 20 or more, and never takes 2 points per turn, regardless of heat level. He will also live through a cockpit breach in vacuum.

Among House forces, only Kurita units have a substantial number of pilots with League suits.

Star League versions of known 'mechs will typically be upgraded with double heat sinks as well, though the League does sometimes economize stupidly and use normal heat sinks. Putting the more advanced freezers on a 'mech does make it much deadlier, though, so League troops are fond of this upgrade.

The Settings

The height of 'mech warfare prior to the Clan war story line was in and around the Star League and First Succession War. From the formation of the League through the wars, there are three basic campaign settings for old-style high technology warfare.

Star League

During the reign of the Star League, the House Lords struggled and connived for influence or power. The League, benevolent protector of the people, watched over everything and tried to keep up, shutting down brush wars and keeping tabs on border conflicts.

Campaigns set in this time period tend to be lower key, with a heavy emphasis on subterfuge. League forces are simultaneously friends to all and none. While the House Lords appreciate the League's ability to keep large enemy forces from massing and causing problems, they would like the opportunity to cause problems themselves. Campaigns may either focus on a Regular Army force dispatched to "put out" a local fire, or on a House force that's trying to set up just such a fire. In a friendly set of games with no referee, players can pick up each side.

The one divergence from low-key battle is the League's attempt to bring the Periphery worlds into the fold. This long, bloody campaign featured League forces facing down under equipped but very motivated Periphery troops. It also heralded the next setting, Civil War.

The Regular Army during this time has strong support from the Star League with very little legitimate interference. League warships can blockade any planet and House forces cannot easily or legally reciprocate. League players should try to operate with a lot of confidence, even overconfidence. They are the Regular Army, and no private House force can stand against them.

Conversely, House militaries know that they have to operate quickly and intelligently to avoid a crushing, shaming defeat. As the instigators, House forces define the scenarios in this era. These include lightning raids, spy missions during "friendly" visits, internal policing missions, and border wars carried out by two Houses before the League steps in to resolve things.

Civil War

In taking power, Stefan Amaris plunged the League into internecine war and made a mess of everything it stood for. Campaigns set in this period are all about full-scale, bloody war. While not really much of a civil war, with Rim Worlds units fighting for Amaris against the Regular Army, it still happens in the streets and fields of the League. New 'mechs are developed, either to carry the campaign back to Terra or as a last-ditch effort to defend the Usurper's throne. This is also the last war before people get the clever idea of blasting each other back into the stone age.

With the Houses by and large keeping wisely out of the way, this is all about the Regular Army at war. It's a real war, too, unlike the League-era bush conflicts. With General Kerensky on one side and Stefan Amaris on the other, players can really get into the name-calling and partisan feelings as they blast their opponents' units to bits.

There are two parts to the Civil War setting. The first is the takeover, with the Rim Worlds units that are "watching over" Terra cleaning up the remaining Regular Army. This is a really messy conflict, with outnumbered League units trying to retreat and join up with the distant Army. Early war scenarios include the ambush of a loyalist unit unaware of the Usurper's declaration, rallying units of either loyalty under fire, or open warfare in the cities and fields of League-defended planets. In the latter stages, Kerensky's advance on Terra can be modeled after the US Pacific campaign of the Second World War. League forces advance in a planet-to-planet conflict, with Amaris weakening and trying ever-more-desperate schemes to defend his power.

First and Second Succession Wars

After the fall of the League and Kerensky's departure, the House Lords made their bids for power. The war that followed was brutal beyond anything the Civil War had seen. While the Civil war had strictly military targets and goals, the House Lords tried to remove each others' ability to make war. They did this well, resulting in the original *BattleTech* setting.

Campaigns set in the First Succession War allow a range of options. The warfare is still big and loud, not yet reduced to the water raids and minor battles of the Third Succession War. Combat missions include territory acquisition, terror missions, straight military conflict, and resource destruction.

In games set in the early days of this war, units will still be top of the line and have all their tech available. Regular Army units that stayed behind and went over to one House or another still have their 'mechs, munitions and combat suits. Everyone is slinging guided missiles and using top of the line combat sensors. If you ever needed an excuse to run large battles with good weapons ranges, this is it.

In the later stages of the First Succession War and the beginning of the Second, however, the changes begin. Factories are destroyed, such that many 'mechs, especially League 'mechs, can no longer be produced. Some no longer have new repair parts being made. Cannibalization of damaged units is common. The first thing to run out is special League munitions, like Swarm, Thunder, Artemis and Narc rounds. After that, specialized units go out of action due to lack of parts. Eventually, units are fielded with crippled targeting systems and forces on all sides are reduced to unguided missiles.

Late-stage First Succession War and early Second War battles present a number of interesting scenarios. Planning out a battle for a force with widely divergent targeting capabilities is a challenge -- do you stick the cripples together and hope for the best, or distribute them across the group to minimize the problem? Some House armies kept their best and least-ravaged 'mechs in large units and tried to use them to break stalemates at critical points. Such a battle may seem one-sided, but a crafty commander can do a lot of damage, and any loss of such irreplaceable units is painful.

Lostech

This fourth option is not really a campaign setting, but an idea for a Third Succession War scenario. Every so often, some lucky soul stumbles upon a Star League cache (more and more often once Fasa decided it was a cool idea). For however long the supplies last, the discoverer has a fighting force of exceptional magnitude with which to threaten their enemies. This is a fun and reasonable way to drop a vintage League-era unit into a normal *BattleTech* campaign and watch the mayhem commence.

Available 'Mechs

Not every 'mech listed in the *Technical Readouts* is available in every campaign described above. Here is a breakdown of units that require special consideration from the **3025** and **3058** technical readouts. Unless mentioned below, every 'mech described in the **3025** and **2750** guides is available for all the campaigns. Only the units mentioned below from the **3058** guide are available for use. Those units described as Star League 'mechs (e.g. every 'mech in the **2750** guide) are only available to League forces in Star League-era campaigns. Rim Worlds units after the beginning of the Civil War have a small number of League 'mechs, stolen from supply bases. After that, all Houses have access

to most League units until supplies run out. All references to the **3025** guide refer to the first, unexpurgated edition of the guide.

Commando	Only available to House Steiner.
Valkyrie	Unavailable until the First Succession War. Davion only.
Jenner	Unavailable until the First Succession War. Kurita only.
Hermes II	Unavailable until the First Succession war. Marik only.
Vulcan	First available to Kerensky's forces late in the Civil War.
Hatchetman	Unavailable.
Vindicator	Unavailable.
Centurion	First available late in the First Succession War.
Enforcer	Unavailable until the First Succession War. Davion only.
Trebuchet	First available late in the First Succession War.
Dragon	Only available to House Kurita.
Quickdraw	Unavailable until the First Succession War.
Rifleman	The model listed in the 3025 guide was first introduced right before the Civil War.
Grasshopper	Unavailable until the First Succession War.
Charger	Used only briefly by League forces during the Star League era. Reappears on battlefields once 'mech supplies begin to dwindle.
Zeus	Only available to House Steiner.

The following units from the **3058** guide are also available:

Night Hawk	This is a Star League unit.
Spector	This is a Star League unit.
Talon	This is a Star League unit.
Chameleon	Everyone has these, though they are rarely used in combat.
Lynx	Available.
Cestus	This is a Star League unit, first put into service right before the Civil War.
Excalibur	This is a Star League unit.
Shootist	This is a Star League unit.
Spartan	This is a Star League unit; Most of them first fought in and were lost during the Civil War.
Striker	Available.
Longbow	Available.
Emperor	Available.
Mackie	Available.
Pillager	Available.
Thunder Hawk	This is a Star League unit, available only to Kerensky's forces during the late Civil War.



by Peter Schweighofer

Castles form a core setting for many fantasy roleplaying games. They serve as the headquarters for nefarious villains, strongholds of just knights, and ruins into which gallant adventurers wander seeking lost treasures. You can find plans for castles in many supplements, rulebooks and adventures, most tailored to the specific game's campaign setting.

But some of the most realistically designed fortresses are those built throughout history. These citadels rose as fortified structures to oppose military threats, display a ruler's material wealth, or collect tolls and conduct other business of the realm. Wars throughout history tested these castles, often proving that few man-made buildings can survive the havoc of battle and siege.

Many nobles constructed borderland forts to protect against enemy incursions, bring law and order to the frontier, and serving as a sign of a kingdom's authority in the region. Here you'll find three detailed border castles you can use in your medieval fantasy roleplaying game campaigns. Each is drawn from a different era in history, and each was constructed with a different purpose in mind -- though ultimately they were all built to protect a kingdom's border.

Each fort is fleshed out to provide settings for adventurers -- a base of operations, an obstacle to avoid or overcome, a safe haven from wasteland creatures, or a place of political intrigue. They also include short historical notes on the real forts, their builders, and the action they saw. Each provides comments on the fort's role, a plan, site descriptions, and several gamemaster characters you can use when your characters venture near the borderlands. You can use the names provided here, or customize the castles for your own purposes.

Saalburg: Border Garrison

Situated along a border between civilized empire and savage tribes, the garrison fort at Saalburg serves to bring some sense of protection, strength, and the prosperity of commerce to one of the kingdom's outlying regions.

Initially the fort consisted of temporary earthworks of the kind used to protect armies on the march. When the empire chose to establish a permanent garrison post here, the old earthworks were enlarged into the current fort. The square fortress is protected by a double-ditch dry moat, four gate houses, and a masonry wall reinforced by interior earthworks. Most of the enclosed space consists of barracks and support buildings for the garrison's 800 soldiers and additional administrative personnel. The troops rotate on guard duty within the fortress and the border wall several hundred feet to the north, a preventive measure against raids from unfriendly tribes.

Most of the buildings consist of masonry construction with pitched roofs supported by wooden beams. Most have thatched roofs, but the more important structures (gate houses, central forum, armory, commandant's house, officers' quarters, and baths) use wood or tile shingles.

Saalburg PDF maps

[Saalburg Border Fort PDF \[51K\]](#)
[Saalburg Fort Defense Cut-Away PDF \[25K\]](#)

Saalburg's defenses can deter even the strongest attack and prolonged siege. The fort is ringed by double trenches, dry moats that in time of war can be further reinforced with abatis -- sharpened spikes set in the far side of a trench to impale and hinder those trying to cross. Most castle battlements consist of two walls with rubble and dirt fill in between for strength; however, Saalburg's walls consist of a single stone edifice backed by sloping earthworks. This enabled the empire's army to swiftly erect fortifications along a border where war could erupt any moment. The gate houses, also constructed of stone, consist of two towers with a parapet over the gates. Soldiers can quickly close and bar the heavy, wooden gates, though they're left open most of the day for the steady flow of troops and civilians with business inside the fortress. Wooden bridges cross the double trenches at each gate. Although the fort has never come under siege, soldiers can quickly set these bridges aflame, or hinder infantry movement across them by scattering caltrops or boiling oil over the boards.

In case of siege, the sloped earthworks provide soldiers ready access to the ramparts. A path runs along the top of the earthworks, providing solid footing for defending troops and frequent patrols. The quartermaster keeps the larder well-stocked, and nearly every structure inside has its own well providing clean, cool drinking water.

The fort stands to the north of a small town that sprang up when the army arrive here to construct Saalburg. The village prospered with the business of the garrison soldiers, plus the increased trade brought along an established, well-patrolled road. While many businesses cater to the soldiers and itinerant merchants, the village still offers a haven for area farmers, who make good profits selling their produce to the garrison. A local chieftain rules the town as mayor, and constructed baths, several temples, and an open market with encouragement from the garrison.

Gate Houses

The four gate houses consist of two flanking towers and the gate, topped by a crenelated parapet. During the day these gates remain open, though a contingent of at least 10 soldiers and one sergeant control passage in and out of the fort at each gate. This guard questions all newcomers regarding their business in the fort and the region. The soldiers recognize most townspeople and frequent visitors and allow them passage unhindered -- unless they stop for a friendly chat or to exchange news.

At night the guards close and bar the gates. The towers each contain an upper and lower room. A patrol walks the parapet and watches from the upper chambers, often huddling around a brazier on cold nights. Their relief sleeps in the small barracks in the room below. Those approaching the gates at night are turned away and threatened with arrest. Only garrison personnel or emissaries of the empire are allowed passage at night.

Central Forum

Most visitors conduct their business in Saalburg's central structure, a forum consisting of four long buildings constructed around a central courtyard. These halls contain the garrison offices, storerooms for administrative documents, scriptoriums for recording business transactions, and offices for imperial bureaucrats conducting business on the frontier (collecting taxes, monitoring trade, taking census).

Three of the four roads leading from the gates bring visitors to the main hall, a bazaar of tradesmen, merchants, bureaucrats, villagers, and others selling their wares to garrison personnel, promoting their business to each other, or waiting for appointments with various administrators elsewhere in the forum. The side halls include offices and meeting areas. The larger hall is reserved for audiences with the garrison commandant, meetings with local chieftains, public trials, and other official gatherings. The back wall of this hall houses the garrison offices, including one for the commandant and another containing a regional map for planning strategies with his officers.

The central forum is one of the few garrison structures into which civilians are allowed. Very few visit the commandant's house or the baths by invitation. Strangers found lurking amidst the barracks or in other areas off-limits to civilians are apprehended and brought to the commandant's attention.

Armory

The garrison's armory shares a similar plan as the central forum: four buildings arranged in a square form a central courtyard. Sergeants use this court to drill their troops in combat techniques -- for drilling larger formations, the soldiers march to fields outside the fort. The largest building houses forges where smiths hammer away at swords and other weapons. Armorers repair and replace damaged armor, fletchers finish arrows, and other craftsmen create and maintain the various tools of war. Most of these craftsmen are drawn from the garrison town or nearby villages, working to support the troops in exchange for pay. The two side halls serve as storehouses for these implements and the materials required to make and repair them.

Commandant's House

Commander Gallus takes residence in a small house build independent of any of the garrison's other structures. He spends little time here, as his duties require him to adjudicate disputes in the central forum, plan strategies with his officers, and oversee the various tasks required of an imperial commander. His house has a small study, kitchen, dining area, and sleeping quarters. He keeps a handful of servants who attend his needs and keep house in his absence.

Despite being a practical man, Gallus occasionally invites his officers, prominent townsfolk, or important travelers to dine with him. On these rare occasions, his servants decorate his humble dwelling and stock the larder with good food with which to indulge his guests.

Baths

To show the local tribesman that the empire can even civilize such backwater borderlands as these, the commandant ordered construction of a small bathhouse, providing pools of hot, cold, and lukewarm water. Gallus keeps several servants here to attend the baths. The commandant often comes here early mornings or late at night to soak in the hot water and calm his nerves. Only Gallus, his officers, and other distinguished garrison personnel (the surgeon and chief steward, for instance) have privileged use of the baths.

Having experienced this marvel at the commandant's invitation, the village's prominent citizens were so impressed that they commissioned a larger, public bathworks constructed within the town (with the assistance of the commandant's chief architect). Commoners can use these baths for a fee. The town views its public baths as a status symbol declaring its prosperity under imperial rule.

Officers' Quarters

The officers keep quarters in two short barracks buildings connected by a larger hall they use for meetings, games, and common amusement during off-duty hours. Each officer has a small room for his personal use. Gallus provides each officer with a servant to attend to his domestic needs and function as a messenger when required.

Mess Hall

Once a day the garrison soldiers cram around this hall's numerous trestle tables for their main meal. The cooks bring food from the kitchens next door and dole out a hot meal to more than 800 men. The troops take their meals in shifts as their duties allow. The midday meal time actually lasts much of the afternoon.

Kitchens

Civilian cooks labor under the supervision of several quartermaster sergeants and the chief steward to provide meals for garrison personnel throughout much of the day. Runners ensure that soldiers patrolling the walls and towers get meals of bread and cheese. Cooks spend most of the morning preparing the great midday meal to serve in the mess hall next door. A separate staff works here to ensure the commandant and his officers receive meals in their offices or quarters.

The kitchens contain several large, stone-lined cooking pits, a main fireplace, and stone tables with braziers beneath to keep food hot. To bake the numerous loaves of bread required to feed the garrison, several outdoor hive ovens rise near the earthworks. To reduce clutter and waste, each soldier is responsible for providing and cleaning his bowl, drinking beaker, knife, and spoon.

Larder

A squad of guards patrols the entrance to this long warehouse, which stores the garrison's food supply. Only the quartermaster, his sergeants, or the kitchen personnel have permission to enter -- though the commandant sometimes takes inventory himself to uncover any misallocation of food. Heaps of grain sacks rise from the floor, barrels of wine and ale line the walls, and salted and smoked meat hangs from the rafters.

The guard is doubled and frequently changed in times of regional famine.

Stables

Although Saalburg serves mainly as an infantry garrison post, the officers and a small corps of cavalry troops require horses. Stables provide shelter for the horses, storage for tack, harness, and feed, and quarters for the grooms.

Barracks

Each barracks building contains ten rooms with eight bunks each. Soldiers share these cramped quarters only when they require sleep. If they're not on patrol, they keep busy elsewhere -- tending to the horses, improving their swordsmanship in the armory courtyard, or lounging around in the open areas between buildings.

Each barracks building has one room set aside as a latrine. Waste drains through pottery pipes into cesspools built at irregular intervals into the fort's outer protective ditch.

Personalities

Commander Gallus

Gallus is a veteran of the military campaigns that established an official imperial presence on the borderlands. He respects both the people in the town at his fort, and the unfriendly tribes across the wall. Gallus knows that to survive out here one must always be ready against attack, but must also cultivate the loyalty and friendship of the local people. He is normally a gentle and soft-spoken man, but is quick to action and stern of tone when circumstances call for him to exercise his authority.

Gallus exhibits a healthy suspicion toward newcomers (like adventurers) who are obviously out here to make a name for themselves and find their fortune here. He sees them as troublemakers bent on abusing the natives, enraging the enemy tribes, and pillaging the region's forests, ruins, and mountains for whatever resources and treasures they can drag off. If they really sought adventure, they would have joined his legions to serve their duty as soldiers. He doesn't actively persecute such visitors, but doesn't go out of his way to help them, either. Should adventurers win his respect, however, Gallus can be a valuable ally. They must do more than simply follow the local laws and stay out of trouble to gain his confidence -- characters might provide intelligence from their forays across the border, help the local people improve their lives, or even aid Gallus and his garrison against an enemy siege.

Crassius, Sergeant of the Gate

Crassius serves as one of the sergeants in charge of the main gate leading from the town into the garrison fort. He's inevitably on duty during the daytime hours when the characters are most likely to wander by, seek entrance to the garrison, and attract his attention. Crassius knows everyone in town and in the garrison. He takes note of strangers in

the area, and faithfully reports the arrival (and other activities) of newcomers to his commandant. Crassius keeps a careful mental record of who comes and who goes from the fort.

Crassius spends his time lounging near the gate with his contingent of guards, questioning visitors, gossiping with villagers, and joking with his comrades. He openly exhibits a friendly attitude toward everyone. When he's not telling stories to his comrades, Crassius is chatting with the village's older citizens, gossiping with the local fishwives, or having what seems to be a friendly discussion with newcomers to the area. Although he often seems like he's distracted by these sociable conversations, Crassius is really keeping one eye on the town's comings and goings. These neighborly discussions provide intelligence about happenings in the region that Crassius dutifully passes along to Gallus. His seemingly innocent bantering with newcomers is in truth a carefully planned presentation to win their confidence and encourage them to share as much information about their purposes in these parts as they'll let slip.

Historically Speaking

The Romans constructed a fort at Saalburg (north of Frankfurt am Main, Germany) to protect the newly won region of Germania in the late Second Century A.D. The Roman armies consistently held regions of Germania west of the Rhine river, but rarely managed to settle lands to the east, which frequently came under attack from fierce Germanic tribes. For many years the Rhine river served as an effective border separating civilized Roman lands from the barbarian wilds. Saalburg served as a bastion protecting the civilized communities the Romans eventually founded inland from the Rhine's eastern shores. A few hundred feet to the north stood a fortified wall much like Hadrian's Wall in northern England, built to keep the uncivilized tribes out of Romanized territory.

Saalburg literally means "Castle of the Halls," a reference to the central halls of the fort's main building where most civil, economic, and military business was conducted. Today the outer earthworks, walls, and gates have been restored, as has the central forum building. A museum showcases many Roman artifacts discovered on the site, particularly those retrieved from wells, which were used as deep trash pits when they ran dry.

Count's Rock: River Toll Tower

The Count's Rock stands on a small island in the middle of a river. It began as a simple stone tower built to threaten passing ships and collect tolls, prevent passage of enemy vessels, and ensure no unauthorized military forces crossed the river here by ferry. Its owner, a noble count, reinforced the tower with an outer wall, a forward bastion, several smaller towers, and enclosed ramparts to better withstand attack.

Count's Rock PDF map

[Count's Rock PDF \[34K\]](#)

The fortress location makes it ideal for controlling passage up, down, or across the river. Both shores are within range of a good longbow. The central tower commands a clear view in every direction, alerting the castle's inhabitants of ships approaching by river or travelers descending the roads leading down from the hills.

When the tower guards notice an approaching ship, they signal it to slow and approach. Unfamiliar vessels receive orders to tie up at the floating pier at the castle's downstream end. The assessor -- accompanied by a small contingent of soldiers -- inspects the ship, questions the captain, and assesses a tariff equal to a percentage of the cargo's value, usually about five percent. Barges carrying passengers must pay two copper pieces per person. The assessor's inspections not only allow him to accurately levy tolls, but give him an opportunity to note what cargo and passengers are traveling along the river.

Riverboats that frequently pass this way and dutifully pay their tolls do not require a visit from the assessor. The fortress soldiers simply allow these friendly ships to slow as they near the castle walls. A guard on the wall lowers a long boat hook, onto which the barge captain affixes a bag with the customary tax. The vessel continues on its way without the delay of the assessor's inspection. In many cases the captains and crews of these vessels have forged friendly ties with the count through their diligence in paying tariffs, by shipping goods for him at reduced rates, or by performing other favors for him.

A company of the region's finest archers ensures that the Count's Rock remains well-defended and capable of punishing those who try slipping past the castle without paying the required tolls. Crenelations protect those firing from the upper parapets, while embrasures in the bastion walls allow archers to fire from within the fortress. Several small towers house ballistae that can also shoot at uncooperative vessels. The archers often employ flaming arrows against tax dodgers - - fire aboard wooden ships and canvas sails is enough of a deterrent to encourage even the most reluctant captains to pay the tariffs.

At night the villages on both shores light bonfires to help illuminate the river. They post guards up and down stream to spot approaching vessels that might avoid notice from the castle's tower. Ships trying to slip by at night are silhouetted against the huge blazes, making them clear targets for the archers.

Since the waters are too deep to ford -- even in times of drought -- a large raft ferries travelers between the two villages. Since townspeople operate the ferry, they do not pay tolls to pass near the castle (and therefore within its protection); however, the count asks that the ferrymen report passengers' names and provide a small tribute for each person or wagon crossing the river here.

The villagers benefit from toll revenue and the count's protection. His income enabled him to provide small garrisons in each village to protect against bandits, other nobles, or vengeful riverboat captains.

Central Tower

The castle's central tower rises above the entire fort, providing an excellent view up and down stream, and of both shores. The upper floors contain the watch post and quarters for the lookouts. Other floors include chambers for the steward and assessor, a small library, and an office. The lowest chambers -- still above the river's high water mark -- house a dungeon and stoutly locked vault where tariff monies are kept until the count's troops come to collect them.

Forward Bastion

At the castle's upriver end stands a triangular bastion, shaped much like a ship's prow to cleave the river's downstream flow. Unlike the tower, this larger stone fortification holds most of the fort's essential chambers: kitchens, storerooms, a small armory, and barracks for the archers and other soldiers stationed here. The covered parapet runs along the outer edge of the bastion, allowing archers to fire on ships dodging tolls.

The quarters here are cramped, with room for 20 archers and guards, and a small kitchen staff. The steward carefully rotates the soldiers to garrison duty on shore, giving them a week in the villages before returning to the toll castle. While their compatriots serve in the fortress, archers in the villages hone their skills in more open environs than available in the tight bastion.

The villagers supply the fortress with food brought over on the ferry. In case of siege, the bastion's kitchen has a deep well, and the storerooms stock enough food to feed the entire castle for one month.

Ramparts

One can walk around the castle's entire perimeter under the cover of the ramparts. Parapets top the outer walls and run along the edges of the bastion. The walls are thick enough to keep the river out and withstand any ramming attacks from ships. The crenelated parapet and embrasures in the bastion provide cover for archers. Several small, reinforced towers project outward in spots, allowing ballistae to defend the fortress.

Floating Pier

A small gate in the downstream wall provides the castle's sole access. A ramp leads from the gate to a floating pier where ships may dock. The pier and ramp rise and fall with the river flow, offering a safe haven for vessels to tie up.

Soldiers can seal the gate with a stout, bolted door and a small portcullis. Should enemies overtake the pier, archers on the walls can quickly set it afire with flaming arrows. A spare ramp is kept just within the gate for such emergencies.

Personalities

Master Tumbold, Tower Steward

The count charged Master Tumbold with governing the fortress and overseeing toll collection. He carries out his liege's stern orders with as much affability as the aging steward can muster. Tumbold ambles around the castle, checking on all the guards and even taking turns watching the river. He dresses in a simple tunic of only slightly better manufacture than those the soldiers wear, though Tumbold permits himself to display a long feather in his cap as an insignificant sign of his station.

Tumbold cultivates friendships with several captains who frequently pass this way. He often gives strangers the benefit of the doubt -- at least until they cross him. Although Tumbold would rather show leniency and mercy, those who try passing the Count's Rock without paying the toll are attacked mercilessly as bandits and rogues intent on evading the authorities of law and order on the river.

Clerk Steuer, Assessor

Steuer serves as assessor and chief toll collector at the Count's Rock. His tall, gaunt form further intimidates ship captains when he glares down his eagle's nose at them. His height also helps accentuate the effect of his long black robes as they swirl around his legs. Steuer rarely speaks -- partly to intimidate others with his silence, and also because his nasal voice sounds too high for comfort.

Despite this near-demonic appearance, Steuer was raised by the church, where he learned to read, write, and calculate sums as a clerk. Although he's not a priest, his abilities in writing and mathematics help him maintain records of ships passing, the cargoes and passengers they carry, and the tariffs they pay. He maintains a minimal friendship with Steward Tumbold, finding the older man much too friendly for the serious job of toll collecting and defending the river. Steuer prefers the company of his master, the count, whom he frequently tries to impress with his dedication, careful book-keeping, and attention to exacting just the right amount of money from river travelers.

Historically Speaking

The Pfalzgrafstein -- commonly known as the "Pfalz" -- sits on a rocky island in the middle of the Rhine river south of Cologne. Various counts, barons, and other factions used similar castles along the Rhine to levy tolls on cargo barges using the river for transport. The counts who owned the Pfalz reinforced the original toll tower with a wall and bastion shaped like a ship's bow to withstand the current. Its unique position as the Rhine's only island fortress ensured it was never captured by enemy forces.

Castle of the Chimes: Artillery Citadel

The Castle of the Chimes is an imposing stone fortification overlooking the narrow section of a lake. With its impressive array of artillery, the fort can strike at any target within the shores of that narrow passage, thus limiting enemy travel between destinations at the lake's farthest ends. Since it was built on the local heights, the castle commands several major roads and bridges allowing passage through the surrounding countryside. The citadel's high stone walls, bastions, and extensive earthworks also defend it well against attacks over land and the lake.

The castle got its name from the sounds made by operating the great artillery pieces -- the catapult and ballistae winding and release machinery makes clanking noises that sound like a dissonant chorus of muted chimes.

Although it overlooks a small village about half a mile away, the citadel has little to do with the townspeople. A detachment of soldiers guards the fort, while a company of artillery experts operates and maintains the machinery. In times of siege, the fort closes its gates while the villagers fend for themselves. The citadel exists solely to protect the kingdom's military interests in monitoring, regulating, and preventing unauthorized passage on the lake and nearby roads.

Defensive earthworks surround the fort, making a direct assault difficult and providing a basic trench system defenders can use against besiegers. The high stone walls surround a central parade ground and barracks, with a bastion at each corner. Two extended bastions form islands that give defending archers enfilading fields of fire against attackers, and provide platforms for additional artillery pieces.

The kingdom sends supplies and fresh troops once a month, though storeroom larders and a deep well can sustain the inhabitants for six months under siege. Few outsiders find welcome here. The gate guards have orders to turn back all visitors unless they are official envoys of the king. The fort garrison suspects most strangers of spying or sabotage. The local villagers know the garrison commander considers certain areas off limits, particularly places where enemy troops might try moving to pass or besiege the citadel. Strangers wandering through the region -- especially the area between the fort and the lake -- might very well find themselves the objects of artillery target practice.

Main Gate

A simple gate allows access to the fort. A tunnel opens in the middle of one wall, leading through the thick stonework and one of the barracks buildings to open onto the central courtyard. The tunnel is large enough for artillery pieces, large wagons, and columns of troops to pass through.

Soldiers can seal the entrance with three stout wooden gates that are easily barred from the inside. Although the gate is no more fortified than the main wall, troops can still defend it well from the parapet above. Invaders can fall under heavy attack at murder holes where the gate tunnel passes through the barracks into the parade ground.

A fortified stone wall keeps enemy troops from charging up the slope directly in front of the gate -- all approaching soldiers must pass before one of the bastions before reaching the castle's entrance. Troops patrolling the gate often stand guard on this wall, within easy running distance of the entrance itself. The garrison commander posts at least 20 soldiers here during the day, when the gates are left open for rapid deployment of troops. The sergeant on duty has standing orders to admit only official military personnel or those delivering dispatches bearing the kingdom's seal. This guard detail dismisses all others -- civilians, strangers, passing travelers -- with the greatest degree of suspicion and contempt.

Walls and Bastions

The citadel's walls are extremely thick, built of stone and fill in most places. The bastions also consist of heavy stonework, though those on the corners each contain rooms used to maintain the fort (see below). The two independent bastions house lower rooms containing emergency supplies should they become cut off during a siege.

Each bastion (including one of the independent ones) mounts two catapults on revolving turntables, allowing the crews to aim them at any target in a 360-degree fire arc. Solid wood construction makes these turntables durable enough to withstand the stresses of catapult operations, though they revolve rather slowly with the entire artillery crew pushing. The mechanisms lock in place once properly aimed at a target.

Each bastion contains a store of ammunition and grease for the catapults. The independent bastions connect to the main walls by wooden bridges -- light walkways that soldiers can quickly hack apart or set aflame if enemy troops overwhelm the independent bastions and threaten to rush into the main fort.

Although they're thicker than most castle walls, the parapets cannot mount the massive catapults like the bastions. Several ballistae defend each wall, and the crenelations protect the archers deployed to guard the walls during a close siege. Ballistae also protect the bastions.

The four corner bastions contain rooms that help maintain the castle's operation:

- **Armory:** The armory houses smithies and storerooms to maintain and replace weaponry and armor. Specialists also craft replacement parts for the various artillery pieces. A workroom provides space for fabricating weapons that do not require smithing. The chimneys all connect to discharge through a central stone vent at one corner of the bastion.
- **Kitchen:** The castle's kitchens occupy the chambers beneath another bastion. Several shifts of cooks work throughout the day (and much of the early morning) keeping the fires stoked, cooking and baking foodstuffs for the daily meals. They draw on supplies from the larder in the nearest barracks, and serve meals to troops and officers in the mess hall beneath the storerooms. Like the armory, the kitchen's ovens and fires vent to the surface through a central chimney at one corner of the bastion.
- **Cistern:** An entire chamber beneath one bastion serves as a cistern containing the castle's water supply. A simple network of drains and pipes collects rainwater that falls on this bastion and the adjacent walls. A trap door in the bastion leads to a small room above the cistern with a simple cheesecloth filter that requires changing after heavy rainfalls. Piping leads through the walls to provide the kitchens and the adjacent barracks with water. Drainage networks on each of the independent bastions also collect water in this manner to supply them in case they're cut off from the main castle during a siege, or supplement the main cistern in times of drought.
- **Dungeon:** The cold, damp chambers beneath one bastion serves as the fort's jail. Captured spies, indolent soldiers, and other offenders languish behind iron-bound doors in cells with some straw, a chamber pot, and a bucket of water. Prisoners guilty of crimes in the region are transferred here from local jails before proceeding under guard to one of the kingdom's infamous prisons.

Barracks

Two-story barracks buildings form a perimeter on three of the courtyard's four sides. These structures house long barracks rooms for the soldiers, a common room for off-duty troops, individual quarters for the officers, a small surgery, stables, and administrative offices for the fort and region. The mess hall and main larder occupy the building nearest the kitchens. Basements in all buildings serve as storage space. The barracks' stone construction helps them resist fire attacks during siege.

The troops use the courtyard for general assembly, training drills, and other public functions. Ramps lead from the courtyard's corners to each of the four main bastions, enabling teams of men to resupply the catapults and ballistae with heavy loads of ammunition.

Personalities

Lord Gaspard, Garrison Commander

The citadel's commander is a petty noble who loyally served his liege in several military campaigns. His experience during siege actions led to his appointment to the Castle of Chimes as commander. While he trusts his stewards to oversee his domain, Lord Gaspard sits in his fortress, guarding the frontier and lake passages against the kingdom's enemies. Although he's grateful for his liege's favor in appointing him commander, he views his service here as punishment for some unknown offense.

Gaspard's simmering anger at his exile at this border outpost shows in his harsh temperament toward all matters within the fort. He constantly drills his troops in the parade ground, and requires the artillery crews to undergo drills and test-firing on their pieces. As this is a purely military fortification, he does not tolerate civilian presence here short of the cooks, smiths, and servants. In addition to frequent supply caravans from the kingdom, he demands additional goods from the townspeople in nearby villages who supposedly enjoy the protection afforded by the castle's presence. The villagers bring supplies once a month, though they unload them just outside the gate.

His soldiers know Gaspard as a stern commander not to be crossed without severe repercussions.

Lieutenant Haver, Artillery Captain

Haver balances his commander's stern demeanor with a friendly temperament and a solid rapport with his artillery crews. Though he only holds the lowly commission of lieutenant, he displays the demeanor of an officer with much greater maturity and experience. He realizes that a military organization like the one occupying the citadel functions best with a good mix of respect and tolerance.

Haver trains his crews well, often floating reed rafts onto the lake for target practice. He's rarely seen without his spyglass, scanning the horizon for enemies, or figuring the ranges to potential targets. During exercises, he strides from one crew to the next, shouting encouragement and supervising their aim. Most of the artillery crewmen have a high regard for him (often higher than for Lord Gaspard), and the general infantry troops hold him in great esteem even though they don't serve directly under him. Haver remains one of the few officers to act with such affability among the men and still maintain an obedient relationship with Gaspard and his stern and sometimes unreasonable demands.

Historically Speaking

Fort Carillon -- better known as Ticonderoga -- was built by the French between Lake Champlain and Lake George in Upstate New York. The French launched several sorties from the fort during the French and Indian War. The British later overwhelmed it during that conflict, and kept a minimal garrison there until American forces -- led by Ethan Allen and his Green Mountain Boys -- captured it during the Revolutionary War. In each case the fort was won primarily because those who occupied it left it under-garrisoned or retreated in the face of a more powerful military force.

Ticonderoga's cannon commanded the southern end of Lake Champlain. The artillery was later removed and hauled overland to aid in the American siege of British forces stationed in Boston. Those running medieval campaigns can use the catapults and ballistae noted in the castle above, or could employ early cannon pieces in much the same way as Ticonderoga did to restrict traffic on the lake and hold off enemies in a prolonged siege.

Pyramid Review

Pyramid Review: Mythica Rules Engine

Mythica Rules Engine



Published by [Roc Games](#)

Distributed by [Deep7](#)

Written by Peter Raines et. al.

Beta PDF; \$7.95

Mythica is Roc Games' debut release, downloadable from their website. As a debut release, *Mythica* leaves me drooling in anticipation of Roc Games' future products. They really did come to the table with new ideas, and I hope they can infect the hobby with some of their creativity.

The game, as stated in the PDF rulebook, is rules-light and stresses roleplaying over combat. Peter Raines and his crew have filled *Mythica* with different widgets that encourage roleplaying. *Mythica* is meant to be playable in any setting imagined by the GM. Currently players must make do with their own home-brew worlds, but Roc Games should be releasing campaign worlds soon. While a little advanced for newbie gamers -- who may ignore game balance -- *Mythica* is a wonderful game in the hands of slightly experienced and advanced players.

Character generation uses a *GURPS*-like point-based system. Nothing new here. When wanting to use a skill, the GM assigns the attempted task a difficulty rating. The mechanic that determines success has a bit of a twist. Different difficulty ratings require different numbers of die rolls. A simple task succeeds when any one of three dice rolls higher than the skill value. Other difficulty ratings require different total successes on different numbers of rolled dice. Instead of searching for another +1 to add to the roll, players spend their time trying to figure out how to change a difficult feat (two successes, two dice) into an average one (one success on one die). In a skill contest the instigator rolls first, a success makes the target's opposing roll one skill level harder, and a failure leaves the roll unaffected. In a chase, or similar circumstance where two successes aren't possible, the two reroll until somebody fails.

As the party wins successes, the GM rewards them with experience points. These points may be used toward advancing skills, statistics, learning magic or can be saved for dire circumstances. Players may also use experience points to affect the outcomes of either their characters' rolls or other rolls that affect their characters. This is a sensible game mechanic to simulate the luck that follows some people around.

Combat works a little different from the norm as well. When defending against an attack, the character gets an attempt to defend. If the blow hits home, damage applies to a hero's damage soak before causing any ill-effects. The GM decides which of the villains has a similar damage soak. This helps keep the party alive a little longer in combat-rich areas. Also, there is no limit to the damage a character may take. When the wounds he received total more than his damage level, he must roll according to skill challenges to stay standing. Failure causes him to collapse, but success indicates that adrenaline and excitement keep the character going. This may not be terribly realistic, but it is interesting.

The magic system showcases Roc Games' talent. *Mythica* worlds follow the basic concepts of mana found in *Authentic Thaumaturgy*, except mana is called makia. *Mythica* has no spell lists. Magic users must learn spell effects piecemeal, using "shards" to construct a complete spell. A player wanting to open a lock, for instance, may use the shards "move" and "metal" to magically pick it, "transmute," "metal," and "spirit" to cause it to disappear, or "destroy" and "metal" to annihilate it, depending on the desired result, and the shards known by the caster.

Once a spell is built and the cost determined, the magus must roll against the Sorcery skill for success. A single-shard spell counts as a simple feat, with more shards making the task more difficult and dangerous. Channeling makia is a dangerous past-time, and based on the difficulty of an attempted spell, the caster risks possible makia strain -- mental damage which can kill as effectively as physical damage. When a spell fizzles (usually because of a failed Sorcery roll) the energies involved remain in the body, making it much more likely to suffer this damage, and doubling its effect. Building spells is an art.

Overall, I am greatly impressed by Roc Games and *Mythica*. Meant for experienced gamers, the rules encourage more roleplaying and character interaction than the "justification of dicing results" mentality of competing products. If you are looking for a game that relies on rules without stressing them, allows the GM to interpret situations and results, and allow the players to actually act, then *Mythica* is one you should definitely check out. If I didn't already have a copy, I'd be hinting to my friends to buy me one for my birthday.

-- *Max Lybbert*

Pyramid Review

The Cities and Knights of Catan (an expansion for The Settlers of Catan)

Published by [Mayfair Games](#)



Designed by Klaus Teuber

Boxed set; \$38.00

In 1995, Klaus Teuber's board game *The Settlers of Catan* won Germany's most prestigious game award, the Spiel des Jahres (Game of the Year). Mayfair Games' English translation of the game won the American Game of the Year Award the following year. The game is widely regarded as being responsible for American interest in other "German" games, such as those published (in English) by Rio Grande Games. Now, Mayfair has given us Klaus Teuber's newest expansion to the game, The *Cities and Knights of Catan*. *Cities and Knights* is a wonderful addition to an already classic game, and adds strategic depth without sacrificing any of the basic game's simplicity.

The first thing you'll notice about *Cities and Knights* is the presence of the Barbarian Horde tile. This special double-hex tile replaces one of the standard water hexes at the edge of the island, and is used to track the progress of the barbarian fleet as it approaches Catan. Every time the special Event die comes up with the black ship (three of the six faces), the barbarians move a little bit closer to Catan.

To combat the barbarians, players must build up a force of Knights. When the barbarians reach Catan, the strength of their attack (equal to the number of cities) is compared to the strength of the Knights' defense. If the barbarians are stronger than the Knights, they will pillage a city belonging to the player who contributed the fewest Knights to Catan's defense. But if the Knights manage to hold back the Barbarians, the player with the most Knights is named Defender of Catan, and receives a victory point.

The other thing that *Cities and Knights* adds is a different way of handling cities. In the basic game, upgrading a settlement to a city doubles the settlement's production. In *Cities and Knights*, cities now produce "commodities" as well as resources. These commodities can be spent to purchase city upgrades along three different paths, which eventually lead to the three great metropolises of Catan. A metropolis is worth two additional victory points (the game plays to thirteen), so competition for the metropolises can be fierce . . . especially in a game with four people, where someone isn't going to get one.

The old development cards have been eliminated from the game, and replaced with "progress cards." Players no longer spend resources directly to buy progress cards; instead, the cards are distributed when the Event Die matches a type of city improvement that the player has built. Some of the progress cards are quite powerful, such as the Inventor, which allows its player to swap two of the numbered chits that control production. Most of the cards, however, are very well balanced, and make the game more unpredictable without sending it careening out of control.

This expansion isn't entirely perfect, of course. For one thing, it makes the game last substantially longer; I've only played one game of *Cities and Knights* that lasted less than two hours, and most last close to three. Compared to the original *Settlers*, where an hour and a half is a "long" game, this factor may turn some gamers off to the expansion. More problematic is the fact that someone who gets behind at the start of the game tends to remain far behind for the rest of the game. This was a problem in *Settlers* too, but it's far more pronounced in *Cities and Knights*, when (due to the barbarians) it's actually possible to lose cities.

In all, however, *Cities and Knights* is a wonderful addition to an already classic game. If you've played *The Settlers of Catan*, you owe it to yourself to try *Cities and Knights* at least once.

-- *J.W. Taylor*

An Evocation of Griffins

"Explain all that," said the Mock Turtle.

'No, no! The adventures first,' said the Gryphon in an impatient tone: 'explanations take such a dreadful time.'

-- Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*

Not quite a convocation of noble eagles; less forthright than the pride of lions, we must perforce collect our griffins with hints, with magic, and with indirection. The griffin (or griffon, or gryphon, or girphinne, or grefyne, and so forth) has the head, wings, and forelegs of an eagle and the body, hindquarters, and ears of a lion. (Heralds and other picky sorts sometimes add the tail of either a camel or a serpent, or the beard of a unicorn, or replace the wings entirely with spikes for the "opinicus".) The griffin, if not first, then definitely foremost, is a unity of opposites -- of Christian salvation and of infernal cruelty, of implacable justice and of unquenchable arrogance. Both bestial and divine, it bisociatively haunts the caves of the deepest underground and the airy rocks of the mountains. So mount up, with Alexander the Great, and see the world from the griffin's eye level. Hold tight.

"These griffins, Aristeas of Proconnesus says in his poem, fight for the gold with the Arimaspi, beyond the Issedones. The gold which the griffins guard, he says, comes out of the earth; the Arimaspi are men all born with one eye; griffins are beasts like lions, but with the beak and wings of an eagle.

I shall say no more about griffins."

-- Pausanias, *Description of Greece*

The griffins, our old [immortal friend](#) Aristeas of Proconnesus says, enjoy above all things the gleam of gold, and they dig it out of the Earth and fish it out of "Pluto's stream" with their immense claws. The Arimaspi, who despite only having one eye are gifted horsemen, wage a constant war with the griffins to steal the gold. The griffins, thus, acquire a taste for horseflesh; although they will devour humans cruelly (much as their Indian cousins the [manticores](#) will), they frenzy for fresh mare. This appetite, although it helps them guard their gold, proves a weakness in guarding their gemstones. According to Prester John (who, as ruler of griffin-infested Central Asia, ought to know) tribesmen in India throw fresh-killed horses down into the Valley of Jewels, knowing that the griffins will carry the now jewel-encrusted corpses out of the valley to their nests. By following the griffins' trail, Prester John's subjects can gather the jewels (especially emeralds and agates) that fall off the horsemeat, without risking griffinish wrath and entering their guarded Valley. [Sir John Mandeville](#) helpfully described griffins as the size of eight lions, with the wingspan of a hundred eagles.

The ferocity, speed, and steadfastness of the griffins recommended them to the gods. Griffins occasionally drew the chariot of Apollo, and that of the Sun from their Indian lairs to their Hyperborean ones. Artemis, Apollo's sister, also kept griffins as coursers, and in a spookily evocative phrase in *Prometheus Bound*, Aeschylus refers to them as "the sharp-beaked hounds of Zeus that bark not." The Greeks also began to associate them with Hermes, the guide of the dead, as the griffins guarded the dead and flew them to the afterlife at the headwaters of "Pluto's stream." Either in their connection with death and rebirth, or their connection with India and the sun, the griffins attached themselves to the stories of tiger-riding [Dionysos](#) -- who entered Greece from "India" in the 9th century B.C. Roughly the same time, intriguingly, that Aristeas visited the Arimaspi "wraapt in Bacchic fury." In other words, while stoned out of his mind on Dionysian soma, Aristeas saw griffins. And they saw him.

"And these are they which ye shall have in abomination among the fowls; they shall not be eaten, they are an abomination: the eagle, the griffin, the osprey, and the vulture, and the kite after his kind."

-- Leviticus 11:13-14

Which, if you believe the Bible (and the medieval bestiarists definitely did), was not A Good Thing. The visionary St. Hildegard of Bingen described the griffin's hidden eggs as nests of vileness, which the noble lion seeks to destroy. The griffin is cruelty and rapacity; it draws the chariot of Nemesis, Vengeance Inescapable. Or, as the Greeks knew her, Nemesis Adrasteia, which catches our griffins in the [Spider Goddess'](#) web. The spiderweb becomes the wheel of Nemesis' chariot, possibly reinforced by the sunwheel of Apollo and the Juggernaut wheel of griffin-plagued India. This is the Chariot of the Tarot; card of tyranny and triumph. Triumph, being, of course, descended from Dionysos'

title Thriambus, and becoming the Trump of the Tarot as the symbolic wheel turns. The medieval bestiarists also knew that Alexander the Great ascended to the "sky of fire" in a chariot drawn by griffins, to "go up into the sky and see if it is the very same sky which we see." Another visionary ascent, courtesy of Dionysos' wine?

If so, he was following a very old path to the sky indeed; fourth-millennium B.C. cylinder seals from the Elamite plateau in southern Persia depict griffins spreading their wings in flight. Griffins entered Egypt around 3000 B.C. and reached Byblos in Phoenicia at almost the same time. Griffins ramped along the walls of Knossos, and strode at the side of Shaushka, the Hittite mistress of the night. The Egyptian griffin, the *sefer*, carried the Pharaoh into the kingdom of Horus, even as it rent and tore the enemies of Set, god of smoke and darkness. Mesopotamian art likewise depicted the griffin as servant of the gods, of Nergal (death) and Ishtar (life). Assyrian and Chaldean art, and later Zoroastrian and Mazdaist iconography, shows griffins guarding the Tree of Life, serving the divine Sun (a griffin represented the Mithraic *heliodromos* degree, the "sun-courier"), and drinking from a fiery cup.

*"The interval between these four contained
A chariot triumphal on two wheels,
Which by a Griffin's neck came drawn along;
And upward he extended both his wings
Between the middle list and three and three,
So that he injured none by cleaving it
So high they rose that they were lost to sight;
His limbs were gold, so far as he was bird,
And white the others with vermillion mingled."
-- Dante Alighieri, *Purgatorio*, Canto XIX:106-114*

Which seems to be where the Holy Grail comes in. Crusaders in Syria saw the ubiquitous griffins-and-cup motifs on temple walls, building pediments, and sacred vessels. Surely, then, this must be the Grail, guarded by griffins in the East. Wolfram placed the Templar castle in India and described the Grail as a green stone fallen from heaven (the griffins' "sky of fire"); other writers described it as cut from a solid emerald. Griffins suddenly appear on heraldic shields; English estate inventories begin to contain "grypeseye" or agate griffin-cups. Griffin eggs (natural mineral nodules hollowed out and polished, or ostrich eggs coated with lapis) had been considered magically potent in Europe even before the Crusades -- King Robert the Pious of France had his nobles swear fealty on a griffin's egg in a silver casket. Griffin-egg goblets were known proof against poison, as were griffin-claw cups such as the ones in the famous shrine of St. Cuthbert in Durham; healing cups like the Grail. After 200 years of Crusader-spawned (Templar-directed?) pro-griffin propaganda, Dante recast the griffin as the emblem of Christ, and his chariot as the vessel of the Christian Roman Empire of perfect justice and divinity.

*"Hence then it appears, that the negative testimony of Michovius is not sufficient to overthrow the received opinion of the Ancients concerning Griffins, especially seeing there is a possibility in Nature for such a compounded animal. For the Gyraffe or Camelopardalis is of a stranger composition . . . Besides, though some fabulous narrations may be added to the story of the Griffins, as of the one-ey'd Arimaspi with whom they fight, yet it follows not that therefore there are no Griffins. If any man say, that now such animals are not to be seen; I answer, It may be so, and yet not perished; for they may be removed to places of more remoteness and security, and inaccessible to men: for many such places there are in the great and vast Countries of Scythia, and Tartaria, or Cathaia, whither our Europeans durst never, nor could venture."
-- Alexander Ross, *Arcana Microcosmi* (1651)*

But by that time, people were beginning to come up with new ideas about the griffin. Marco Polo thought the true explanation of the griffin was sightings of the roc, which is pretty close to the modern theory that the griffin was "actually" the bearded and crested Lammergeier vulture. Albertus Magnus doubted that griffins existed at all outside "books of history," which is intriguingly close to the notion that the legend stems from fossil dinosaur eggs dug up in Mongolia by the Scythians' neighbors. (Looked at right, ceratopsians have the four limbs, beak, and "mane" of the griffin.) A Polish scholar, one Mathias Michovius, wrote in 1518 that since there was no gold, and no Arimaspians, in the "northern region" (he was half right), there were no griffins there either. Ulisse Aldrovandi's magisterial *Ornithology* of 1599 placed griffins firmly in the list of "fabulous birds." Sir Thomas Browne's 1646 *Popular Errors*

again refuted the griffin, despite the fervent objections of Alexander Ross, chaplain to King Charles I. Ross, the first translator of the Koran into English, firmly defended the ancients' wisdom, sounding remarkably like a modern cryptozoologist. His work brings to mind a wonderfully-lurid notion for a Restoration-era *In Search Of* . . . campaign (*GURPS Swashbucklers-Fantasy Bestiary*) in which bold cavaliers strike out for Furthest India to strike a blow for romance, griffins, and good St. Cuthbert against killjoy Puritan rationality.

*"Not grey, but Griffin! No one likes to hear
Himself called grey. In every word there rings
An echo of the sense from which it springs:
Grey, grizzled, gruesome, grim, and grave-yard -- thus
They tune in etymology, but us
They put quite out of tune."
-- The Griffin, in J.W. von Goethe's *Faust, Part Two*, II:iii*

Goethe's griffin brings up an interesting angle. The etymology of the griffin, like that of the [sphinx](#), is uncertain. The Latin *gryphus* comes from the Greek *gryps*, which was the word Aristeas apparently used to describe the hideous winged and clawed creatures he astrally encountered in Central Asia. Some scholars trace it to *grypos*, the Greek for "hooked" (like a beak or claw), others to an Indo-European root cognate with "grip" and "grasp," while Grimm was the first to suggest a connection with that other winged guardian enigma, the Babylonian *kerub* or cherub.

Allow me to present one final possibility. The griffins mine and hoard gold that makes its way into the hands of one-eyed beings in Central Asia. Into the hands of the Lemurians, in other words; ancient cyclopean entities guided by the astral spirits held within Dionysos' soma. (And who, like the griffin-roc, also dwell in [Madagascar](#).) This egg-born (!) race built the griffins, recombining DNA in an emerald grail from heaven. (Is it a coincidence that alchemist and immortal Nicolas Flamel acquired his griffin-decorated grimoire from Sefarad; perhaps not Spain at all, but the land of the Sefer -- griffins?) As the Lemurians fell further into decadence, the griffins rose up against them (just as the shoggoths, the ne plus ultra of chimerae, rebelled against the Elder Races in Lovecraft's theosophy) and the war was on. Lemurians domesticated the horse (on the verge of extinction just as the griffin emerges on the Iranian plateau) and trained humans to ride, and to ride the waves of hallucination to balk the griffins. Eventually, the Lemurians faded into the astral, and the covert Templars at the Stuart court couldn't keep the griffins materialized either. Like us, they lost the griffins (and their Grail) somewhere in a cave in India Ultraterrestria. And we find ourselves, at the end (and the beginning, as the griffin's wheel turns) unable to hold the griffin in place. Between Apollo and Dionysos, Christ and Nemesis, between black and white, flits the grey and indefinable griffin.

Murphy's Rules



by John Kovalic

Murphy's Rules



Murphy's Rules



O.D.T.A.A.

Last night I was up until six A.M., finally finishing the editing of *GURPS Best of Pyramid Volume 1* (a title I hope isn't as optimistic as *GURPS Middle Ages 1*).

I needed to be at my "real world" work early the next day, because two people were sick, and we were still suffering from employee shortages brought about by one person quitting and another person being fired.

At my real world gig, today we got word that the boss's hard drive, which had suffered a head crash, was completely unrecoverable.

The hard drive was damaged because the boyfriend of another employee had, in anger, pounded on the desk so hard as he was being escorted out of the building, that the laptop the drive was in fell off the desk, resulting in the head crash.

And, in all probability, when I bike to work tomorrow, it will be raining.

Now what does this have to do with gaming?

Well, my life is currently an example of one of the tricks I like to use every so often in my gaming.

When it rains, it pours.

Now, many folks (including myself) tend to design fairly linear and focussed adventures. The bad guy does something bad, the good guys chase after him, there are complications, the good guys triumph. Even if the specifics aren't linear, most options and complications at least relate to the main plot.

But the real world seldom gives you free reign to pursue your bad guys. No, just when you think you've got things under control, something bad happens. Or something different happens. Or something good happens.

The point is, whatever happens, it usually has *nothing* to do with whatever you're focussed on.

So let's say you've got Superhombre trying to keep Spleeniatic from destroying the world with his Illudium Q-36 Explosive Space Modulator hovering over the unaware city. S-hombre is flying towards the device when, using his Schwa-Ray Vision, he sees an unscrupulous gentleman robbing someone with a gun. Dangit. What does the paragon of virtue do?

Or, right before the climactic battle with the Orc Leader, the party healer starts hearing voices from some netherworld entity. It's probably demonic, sure . . . but it's just a coincidence that it happened right before that combat (or is it?).

Or your spaceship is on a diplomatic mission to a long-lost world. There's a mystery planetside the party is investigating. Meanwhile, a member of a trickster alien race has tracked the PCs there, and has "official" paperwork claiming the ship the heroes are using was actually stolen from their people. (This is, of course, a lie.) And, finally, a member of the away team has found an alien artifact with strange powers . . . powers that are *completely* unrelated to the matter at hand.

Although most movies generally need to be more focussed, many TV series (where as much time per installment doesn't need to be spent on characterization) make use of this technique to keep things interesting. *Law & Order*, for example, generally has plots where two or three intertwining, unrelated, whacked-out things are bobbing around the pool waiting for the protagonists to resolve (or ignore) them. Many sitcoms also have several plots and complications going on at the same time. And it's difficult to find a book where multiple things *aren't* happening.

If you want to try this technique, here are some tips:

- **Don't do it all the time, unless you're a juggling genius and your players love it.** It takes a fair amount of

planning to make complicated adventures work, and making your players continuously waiting for the next shoe to drop can get old. Besides, complications are nothing if not unpredictable; sometimes the most surprising complication is one that *doesn't* happen.

- **Figure out how to tie it in.** Ideally you'll have a good idea of a moment, and can work in a complication into that moment organically. Thus you may have an idea that the heroes are going to chase after the bad guys in their car on the interstate. What if the car suddenly billowed black smoke out of it in the middle of the chase? Do the PCs push the car and hope it stands up to the abuse? Do they try to do a quick repair job? Do they abandon the car and pursue another option?
- **Be flexible.** If the heroes take the bus instead of their car, there's (naturally) no reason the car should start threatening to burst into flames. Maybe the car will break next time . . . or maybe the GM should just drop that plot point for another day.
- **Things work out.** In the real world, even if you don't make an effort to put out *every* fire that erupts around you, things have a habit of generally working out. (At least, that's my theory, and as a card-carrying optimist, I'm sticking to it.) Thus if the hero's cat sprints out the door as he's leaving his apartment to investigate the mystery, and he decides not to chase after it, maybe it'll be waiting outside the door when he gets home.
- **Keep options limited.** Generally, if you can get in contact with folks who might cause complications, they'll understand, and let you weasel out of it . . . especially if you're saving the world. Thus, if you want the romantic interest's mother-in-law to visit, have her write a letter instead of call. Likewise, if the heroes call an NPC to help them with a complication, make sure *they* get called by NPCs with oddball (inconvenient) requests . . .
- **Good things happen.** Psychology teaches us that good things can be just as stressful as bad things. It's true. What if, during the street-side investigation of the villain's deeds, the music-loving hero discovers a piece of evidence in a dumpster . . . next to a vintage jukebox? It'd be a great addition to the PC's collection, but it's huge and unwieldy, and the investigation needs to be done quickly. And the rumbling of the garbage truck is getting closer . . .
- **Disadvantages = complications.** If you, as a GM, aren't combing your PCs' disadvantages as ideas, do so now! This is especially true for complications. So if a character believes all life is sacred, mention how there's a blood shortage in the city. If he donates blood (which he may well), then he can be woozy when the "real" adventure begins. (And he'd better not strain his arm . . .) Dependents, allies, and contacts can all provide obvious complications, but so can the more inward disadvantages. Play with compassions, attractions, and repulsions.
- **Complications need to be fun.** Complications are *not* an excuse to muck with your characters' lives living hells; they're good for giving your heroes additional adversity to overcome *without* having Dr. Mood be responsible for everything that goes wrong. If you're players are annoyed with their heroes suddenly catching the flu, don't force such things on them in the future.

Heroes are often as good as their adversity. And reality often has a way of providing us with lots of adversity . . . and thus lots of chances to be heroic.

At least, that's what I'm telling myself after the week *I've* had.

-- Steven Marsh

* * *

*Last week's answer: **Awful Green Things From Outer Space**, second "Voyages of Exploration Ship Znutar" comic strip (pages vary depending on printing)*

(One star) "You want a bird to tell you about cats? Oh yeah, I got yer cats right here. The Eyes of Gaia, yes. The Brain of Gaia? Not so much."

Pyramid Review

Zombie Master Screen (for All Flesh Must Be Eaten)

Published by [Eden Studios](#)



Written by Ben Munroe

Additional Material by Al Bruno, CJ Carella, Derek Guder, M Alexander Jurkat

Illustrated by Brad Rigney, Christopher Shy, George Vasilakos
Cover by Christopher Shy and George Vasilakos

48 pages; \$16.00

The *Zombie Master Screen* is the first supplement for Eden's *All Flesh Must Be Eaten* RPG of Survival Horror, where the players are pitted against the overwhelming horde of the undead. The game uses the Unisystem game mechanics which makes it compatible with *WitchCraft* and *Armageddon* (two Unisystem Games developed by CJ Carella). Since Unisystem is a generic game system, *AFMBE* can be used to play any scenario from *Night of the Living Dead* to *Aliens*. It's all about people trying not to be horribly killed by inhuman things.

The actual screen part of the *Zombie Master Screen* is very well-designed and provides all the tables that a Zombie Master (what other systems would call a Game Master) will need while running a game. The screen is a sturdy four-panel design that is more than enough to hide all the rolls that the Zombie Master is going to lie about so that he can inflict whatever fate on the players that he wanted to anyway. The other side of the screen (which the players will look at while the ZM is cheating on his rolls) is one of the best parts of this whole package. It's a 70s-style mural that depicts a zombie-fighting trio holding their own against the undead horde. The shirtless martial artist has a giant afro and the guy next to him resembles John Saxon. It is like a poster for a Seventies Horror movie and even proclaims that the feature is in "Living Stereo."

The book that comes with the screen continues this cinematic feel -- the credits are even done as film credits! The first part of the book is "A Bad Day at the Office," a two page vignette chronicling one man's efforts to escape a building full of the hungry dead. It has a nice twisty ending.

The next part is the introduction, which includes "No Such Things" by Al Bruno. This piece is about what life is like after the zombie hordes have brought civilization to a screeching halt. The introduction then includes a summary of the main adventure that follows. The adventure "Coffee Break of the Living Dead" then takes up the bulk of the book.

"Coffee Break of the Living Dead" concerns six normal human beings and one really bad day at work. The adventure starts off as just another day at work at an average office building. All six end up on the same elevator when the building's power goes out. At that point the group must try to either make it out the lobby door or to the roof without being mutilated by the living dead who have overrun the block their building is on or shot by nervous national guardsmen. It's a great adventure which has a nice *Resident Evil*/George Romero feel to it.

After the adventure comes a section of new rules for *AFMBE*. The section on campaign levels, the optional skill point generation system, and some of the new character qualities have all been taken from Eden's *WitchCraft* system for the benefit of those people who own *AFMBE* but don't own *WitchCraft* yet. There is a new section on creating Zombie

player characters, because while it's fun to shoot the brains of ambulatory corpses, sometimes it's also fun to shamble along the sidewalk and eat the flesh of the first person you met. (At least that's what I have heard.) This section also includes new Aspects, which are the powers of various types of zombies. Some of the Aspects are cool and some are creepy, all of them were pretty useful for the **Zombie Master** who wants to create a unique monster to plague his players with.

The last section is an essay about **Zombie Survival Horror**. It addresses the issue of what **AFMBE** is all about, and also includes general advice on running a scary game. Many horror games end up being about a group of heroes with strange powers and big guns chewing their way through supernatural cannonfodder which might as well be a bunch of storm troopers or orcs. In an **AFMBE** game, the players should be uncertain of their survival. The game is supposed to be like a scary movie, so the players should be scared. Since the game is supposed to be like a scary movie, the players should also have fun.

The **Zombie Master Screen** is a great supplement and a useful tool for anyone running an **AFMBE** game. It is also useful for those running **WitchCraft** games until the **Chronicler's Screen** comes out. The cover alone makes me want to use it as a GM screen for every game I run. It's a good product and I highly recommend it.

-- *Thom Marrion*



by **Bruce Kvam**

Art by Ruth Thompson and Color Alex Fernandez

Serge knew he was in trouble when the burst from the AK47 hit him in the back. He slammed into the wall, his precious blood gushing onto the five-hundred-year-old fresco that adorned his lair. He crumpled to the floor like a shattered mannequin.

Now that the slayer's masking spell was broken, Serge saw that his assassin was alone: watching, waiting. Serge let his eyes glaze over as the pool of blood blossomed around him on the cold tile floor. Lulled, the slayer came out of the antechamber and set down the rifle. Curiously, there was no hint of hatred in the man's gray eyes as he pulled a wooden stake from his jacket.

A ruby ring on the slayer's finger glinted like an angry red eye. As the bloodthirst arose in Serge's throat, the memory of the first time he saw such a ring flashed before his eyes. A memory of the time when he still breathed the warm, sweet air of Provence . . .

The guards' pikes formed a gauntlet of blades on either side of the red carpet. The men stood impassive, unseeing, mindless. As Serge approached each pair, they pulled their weapons upright with a jerk, as if they were puppets on strings.

At last Serge came to their mistress, a beautiful woman in a fine brocaded dress. She eschewed the powdered white wigs favored by the timid-looking courtiers who whispered in the wings. Rather, she wore her own dark, lustrous hair in a full pompadour around her lovely alabaster face. At her side was a huge gray dog, teeth bared and eyes smoldering like candles.

Serge had been leery of accepting the invitation to the marquise's court, but the sudden, inexplicable death of his father had left him little choice. The lady extended her hand to him; on her forefinger a ruby ring glowered like a bloody eye. As he knelt to kiss her hand, the animal growled.

"Does my pet bother you, cher Serge?" Marquise Antoinette asked. Her blood-rouged lips parted to reveal sharp fangs.

* * *

In literature and film, flashbacks show how relationships between characters are forged, explain a character's motivations, and reveal the source of a character's innermost fears. Television shows such as *Highlander* and *Forever Knight* often spend as much time in the past as they do in the present.

Flashbacks exemplify one of the cardinal rules of good writing: *Show, don't tell*. It's much more engaging to see events unfold than to listen to a dry, third-person narrative. Flashbacks can enliven roleplaying games the same way.

Flashback Seeds

When players create characters, they're always scraping for character points. Enemies are a favorite out, especially in superhero games. When creating Captain Liberty, the player probably won't explain exactly why Zorkon hounds Captain Liberty so doggedly. The player just needs 10 more points, and doesn't have time to write an extensive backstory for Zorkon. Many players equate such out-of-game preparation to doing homework.

Using flashbacks, the Game Master and the player can collaboratively sketch out the Enemy. Since a flashback is more of an improvised story than a combat simulation, the GM doesn't need to prepare a detailed character sheet. A rough outline will usually suffice: the events of the flashback will shape the Non-Player Character. The result will be a better rounded Enemy in the present, with tighter connections to the character.

Although everyone knows how things turned out, playing out past events can still be entertaining and enlightening. Nuances that might have gone unnoticed in that brief description of the Enemy on the character sheet can be fleshed out. Such details can make a tremendous difference in how a player character relates to the NPC in the present.

Flashbacks have certain advantages over "extemporaneous" roleplaying. Since everyone knows how things turn out, players have more freedom to actually *roleplay*, without worrying about picky little things like dying. Characters can be friendlier and more generous and trusting, behaving more like real people instead of constantly second-guessing the GM. Best of all, the player can often do the right thing without any coaching from the GM. In a flashback, Captain Liberty's player can go along with the GM and let Zorkon trap him in the Evil Engine of Death, because the player *knows* Cap will survive. And the player will know *exactly* why the Captain despises that low-down, good-for-nothing, crumb-nibbling skunk.

Flashbacks require cooperation between the players and the GM. Players have to give GMs the latitude to do things to the PCs that they would normally never allow. Surrendering your character this way makes the events much more visceral, providing real motivation for the *player* to dislike an enemy. This can make the player's job easier, especially for those who feel they lack that spark of creativity when fleshing out their character's histories.

Enemies are not the only motivation for flashbacks: other disadvantages make good fodder too. Phobias, Intolerance, Rivals, Duties, Amnesia, Codes of Honor, Vows, and (of course) Flashbacks can often be attributed to a turning point in a character's life. Reliving such seminal events can be very revealing. Advantages and Powers are also good: Patrons, Allies, Trained by a Master, Clerical Investment, Magery, etc., may have an interesting back story. Super Powers are naturals for flashbacks.

Finally, a character's origin is practically a mandatory flashback. Any vampire, revenant, superhero or *Highlander*-style immortal should play through the event that blessed or damned him with great powers.

Using Flashbacks

Flashbacks make past events live and breathe. Here are some techniques for incorporating them in play.

How It *Really* Happened

Flashbacks can impart information to the players that they might have otherwise missed, or introduce NPCs who, for plot purposes, need to figure prominently in the present but otherwise haven't appeared in previous gaming sessions. A flashback can be used to introduce such characters and information.

For example, let's say a player dashed off the following on his character sheet when describing his Patron: "Got me into the Space Patrol." When the group encounters a man with a nasty scar on his face, that player has a flashback. The flashback explores the details of the character's induction into the Patrol, introduces a few characters, explains how the man got the scar, and gives some background about the relationships among the scarred villain, the patron and the

character. Then when scarface plunges his vibrosword into the character's left thigh, the player will know exactly why.

Flashbacks as Training

In some genres the player characters are often very powerful, with a wide assortment of powers and skills. New players may be overwhelmed by the array of abilities, and may not know best how to use them. Rather than just sitting and explaining how these abilities work, GM to player, use a flashback. With the GM in the role of the character's mentor or master, the player can assume the role of the naïve or unskilled neophyte. The player can then try out these abilities in a "live" situation without worrying about making mistakes in the present that would kill the character. If the player discovers that an ability doesn't work as expected, the GM should allow the character to be revised accordingly. This will prevent grossly incorrect assumptions about how things work, making for a much happier player.

The Friend of My Enemy Is My Enemy

An interesting twist is to use flashbacks to develop a relationship between the Enemy or Patron of one character with a *different* player character (or characters). It's often useful to keep the identity of the NPC unknown, to prevent premature judgment on the part of the players.

For example: Horst, Edgar and Rhiannon run into a knight-errant at the court of Duc de Navarre. Suddenly, Edgar has a flashback to that same knight helping some peasants pull a wagon out of the mud. Edgar stops and lends his back to the effort. He and the knight repair to the inn down the road to enjoy conversation and drink. There, Edgar gets into a brawl with local thugs, and the knight saves Edgar's life. Don't come right out and tell Edgar's player that this same knight killed Horst's lord in a fight over a woman. Let the player make the connection after the flashback concludes and he sees the look of hatred on Horst's face when the court crier announces the knight's name.

If the relationship between the NPC and the second PC isn't going the way you anticipated, don't force it. Let the player decide how to relate to the NPC. If the player winds up hating the Enemy, he and the other player have something in common. If he befriends the Enemy, then an interesting dynamic is set up between two players.

Flashbacks as Emergency Scenarios

Flashbacks can be good "filler" material for GMs strapped for the next installment in their campaigns. Face it; sometimes GMs just don't have enough time to prepare for the next gaming session. Instead of delaying the inevitable, try this instead: before the session, scan your players' character sheets. Look for an Enemy, Disadvantage or Advantage that the player never quite explained to your satisfaction.

Then put the player on the spot. Flash the character back to that time and have the *player* explain what's happening, through the character's eyes. Listen, then run with what the player gives you. Weave something about the current events in the campaign into the flashback to give a motivation for the flashback, and perhaps a hint that illuminates a current mystery in the campaign. You'll be surprised at how easily story links form during your interaction with the players.

You can also use this technique if players are absent from a gaming session. Rather than skipping the evening, you can run a flashback scenario involving only the player characters present.

Flashbacks as Time Travel

Flashbacks can be an interesting form of time travel. In campaigns where the characters are very long-lived (vampires or other immortals), flashbacks can be used to transport the players and their characters back in time. (More details on a flashback-oriented campaign are below.)

For example, if the players in your Vampire campaign are tiring of incessant attacks by blood-thirsty anarchists, you might flash back to Enlightenment-era France for a *soirée* with Voltaire, to the Renaissance for the unveiling of

Leonardo's great equestrian statue, to Revolutionary Russia to arrange Rasputin's demise (an Undead, no doubt), or to Vlad Tepes's reign for dinner with Dracula himself.

Always make flashbacks relate to the player characters' histories and personalities. The campaign is about the *player characters*, first and foremost. Let them assume a larger role than recorded history might indicate. If it tickles the players' fancy to make Einstein see the light, seduce Napoleon, or stand beside Nelson at Trafalgar, let them do it. And if a player wants her character to actually have *been* Florence Nightingale or Mata Hari, let her do it. Queen Victoria is another story, however . . .

In historical flashbacks the GM can afford to be generous: if the players can justify it, let the characters have outrageous wealth, connections to powerful kings, or fabulous magical weapons. By the present time they will have lost these ephemeral things, so let them have fun.

Running Flashbacks

There are practical considerations for running flashbacks. First, make sure that *all* your players are entertained, not just the one having the flashback. If possible, choose flashbacks that involve more than one character. If that's not possible, keep one-on-one flashbacks brief.

Switching back and forth between past and present is a technique frequently used in literature and film. Such flashbacks can provide an interesting counterpoint, showing the relationship between events then and now. It can also prevent players not involved in the flashback from getting bored.

A perfect time for a one-on-one flashback is when one character is separated from the group, perhaps due to injury or disability. Rather than having an injured character's player skip the next two gaming sessions, consider using a flashback to give the character insight on the current situation and something to do while the other players carry on.

Flashbacks should have a logical *trigger*. Unmotivated flashbacks can be disconcerting and confusing to players. Flashbacks should generally have some bearing on events in the present, either to explain something or introduce an NPC.

Use dramatic license to introduce flashbacks. Instead of saying, "You see Marcus Tal, and you have a flashback to 1810," say, "A man approaches you, carrying a white lily. The lily morphs into a *fleur-de-lis* in a coat of arms on the wall of a French palace. You are attending a *grande soirée* in Napoleon's Paris. The beautiful woman on your arm asks you why you are so pale."

Use foreshadowing, another trusty literary device, to provide the characters greater insight during the flashback. For example, the PCs are trying to uncover the identity of a crazed killer, but the players have completely missed all the clues that you as a GM have placed for them. A flashback to a similar case can jog the players' mental elbows, without explicitly giving everything away.

Don't let a flashback drag on. Once it has accomplished its goal, return to the present with a transition symmetrical to the trigger. Unless, of course, your players are having a blast -- let that go on as long everyone is having fun.

The Immortals Campaign

Though flashbacks can be used in any kind of campaign, they reach their full potential in campaigns that have long-lived characters such as vampires, deathless immortals, longevity-potion-swilling wizards, body-switching sorcerers, reincarnating revenants, booster-spiced spacers or disembodied spirits. In such campaigns, players should design their characters with flashbacks in mind.

Immortal Character Creation

Immortal characters have a *lot* of history. Most players don't have the time, inclination or knowledge to create all that detail at once, but immortal characters are fun precisely because they have all that history. So where does that history come from? Flashbacks, of course.



When running an Immortals campaign, the GM should make sure that there's plenty of overlap among the lifespans of the characters. Players whose characters who are significantly younger than the others will find themselves idle during flashbacks that occur before their births (though this can be alleviated with Alter Egos -- see below).

As GM, you should set a minimum age for Immortal characters, which encompasses the eras that interest you. Players should pick a birth date before that time, and at least one era or historical event after that date that interests them. You should encourage players to define "rendezvous points" with each other's characters throughout the timeline. Players should put as much detail into their characters' backgrounds as they can. But don't be disappointed if no one does. It just gives you that much more leeway. If they make no decisions, feel free to make them yourself.

It's impossible for players to detail every single acquaintance and enemy over a long lifetime during character creation, but you should require them to name at least one Enemy and one Rival (a half-cost Enemy). Beyond that, you can allow a certain number of TBD (to be defined) Enemy or Rival disadvantages. You can also allow one or more TBD Ally advantages, who may appear at critical junctures as *deus ex machina* saviors. All TBD NPCs should be half or quarter the normal point values, since the player is taking the easy way out and leaving it up to the GM to define them. Using TBD Enemies in play is described below.

The Younger Self

In most immortals campaigns, characters grow over time. They don't have the same lofty power and skill levels throughout their lives. In flashbacks where combat occurs, the GM and the player must decide these prior levels. Ambitious players can design multiple versions of their characters: a full-point version for modern times, and one or more younger versions played in flashbacks. Otherwise, just knock off a skill or power level for each significant segment of the character's life.

The younger selves can be much different from the current character, but generally they will be weaker. Since players know that they survived flashbacks, the younger selves don't have to be tremendously combat-worthy. Players can afford to make their younger selves substantially weaker to make their characters' earlier lives more interesting. Conversely, some characters might have been more powerful in combat in the past than in the present. A knight who saw too much blood and death during the Crusades might well swear off the sword in later life and dedicate himself to peace.

In real life people remake themselves all the time. As GM, you should grant the players the right to make these decisions themselves (within reason, of course). A varied and checkered past can make an immortal character very interesting to play.

Building and Running the Immortals Campaign

When you have all the players' characters, each of the eras the players indicated becomes a *locus*, a place and time where flashbacks may occur. Using these loci, you can interweave them to form a narrative through flashbacks, or to provide springboards for scenarios in the present with origins rooted in the past.

When flashing back to a particular locus, make sure that at least one character knows who his character was at that time. Describe things through that character's eyes so that the other players get a feeling for the times. If players haven't decided who their characters were at a particular locus, give them some time to figure it out. It's good technique to time the beginning of a flashback so that it occurs near the end of the playing session. This will give the players who haven't filled in their histories some out-of-game time to think about who they want to be in that era.

Don't be afraid to let the players ham it up. If a player wants his character to be one of Napoleon's marshals, let him. It's all right if your flashback bends history a little. Who's to say how it really happened, anyway? Half the fun of flashbacks is finding out that *your* character was responsible for sinking the Titanic.

In flashbacks the players don't always know who's who. Immortals use different names over the centuries. Sorcerers may inhabit different bodies. The humanity drains out of vampires like so much blood, drastically changing their appearance and behavior. Sometimes people just forget a face, or blot it out of their memory because it's too painful.

TBD Enemies enjoy their greatest use in flashbacks. Typically, TBD Enemies enter the character's sphere of influence in the present, causing some consternation. They may meet and befriend other player characters, both the character's modern Allies, friends or lover, or mess with the player's source of income. When the player character finally encounters the TBD Enemy in the present, the GM initiates the flashback and everything becomes clear. The TBD enemy can be a very sympathetic character in the beginning of the flashback, before the tragic event that ruined his life and turned him against the PC. Or he could have been rotten to the core from the very beginning.

Make each TBD Enemy unique and memorable. They can turn into unifying force among the players, or a divisive wedge. Making the same NPC one player's Enemy and another player's Ally can provide for some entertaining play, during which the GM can just sit back and watch the fun. And the great thing about flashbacks is that when the players have Enemies they love to hate, they can keep coming back in flashbacks even after they've been killed off!

Alter Egos

When a flashback centers on only one or two characters of a group, or occurs before a younger player character was born, the players whose characters aren't involved will find themselves idle.

Not to worry: as a GM you can assign the idle players *alter egos*. Alter egos are NPCs played for the duration of the flashback. If the flashback is going to be extensive, the players can design their own alter egos, if they're so inclined. Alter egos have their own motivations, desires and goals. You should tell the alter ego's players what those motivations are, letting them know what specific actions the character should take in the scenario. Beyond that, encourage the players of alter egos to embellish and make the characters their own.

It's the players' job to breathe life into alter egos and make them interesting foils for the PCs in the flashback. Since you're roping the players into helping you GM, you should make sure that you reward them, perhaps with flashbacks for their own characters.

Alter egos may be the older character's sidekick, ally, patron, lover, enemy, etc. They can be recurring. If several flashbacks occur to that same locus, the same player should run the alter ego again (if it survives!).

Experience and Flashbacks

There are two takes on awarding experience points for flashbacks:

1. Award no experience for flashbacks: since you know your character has survived to the present day, you don't get anything because you don't risk anything.
2. Award experience points for good roleplaying, no matter when it occurred. This can be justified by a character "learning from his mistakes."

Generally, if flashbacks are brief, no experience is necessary. If flashbacks are extensive, however, you should award roleplaying experience.

Summary

At their heart, roleplaying games are interactive storytelling. The same techniques that make books and films more interesting can do the same for your gaming sessions.



by **Mark A. & Jennifer Schmidt**

We've been playing a lot of *INWO* lately and noticed that in a larger game it can take a while for the last player to get into the game. The more players at the table, the longer each person spent "out of the game," watching and interfering in the other player's actions, but unable to act.

Controlled Chaos: An INWO Variant

This variant brings everyone into the game sooner by limiting each player to one action at a time while sharing turn phases. In each phase of the turn, all players act.



Setup for standard and OBD games remains the same, except the players do not roll to determine who goes first.

The turn sequence is as follows:

1. Determine the player order by the following criteria and tiebreakers:
 - a. Most groups
 - b. Highest total Power
 - c. Highest total Resistance
 - d. Highest total Global Power
 - e. Dice rolls, as required.
2. Draw a Plot card, if desired. In an OBD game, do this in player order. You may purchase extra Plots with action tokens as a free action at any time, even interrupting the draw sequence.
3. Draw a Group card. In an OBD game, do this in player order.
4. Take ATOs, as described in the existing rules, in player order.
5. Action Token Placement Phase: Everyone places action tokens as appropriate.

Main Phase

6. Each player, in player order, may attempt one attack, take any other single action, or pass. Other actions include playing a plot that requires an action token, playing a New World Order card, or using their Illuminati action token to bring out a Resource. Free moves do not count as an action, and may be used freely.

A player may declare a win when a Goal is achieved. A win *must* be declared in this phase, allowing the other players to spend action tokens and use plots to stop the win.

This phase ends when all players have passed in order.

End of Turn

7. End of Turn actions. Everyone must discard any excess Plot cards, Bermuda reorganizes, cards lasting to the end of a player's turn expire, free actions may be taken, and winning conditions are verified. If someone met the winning conditions, declared a win, and the other players could not stop the declared winner, the game ends

here. Otherwise, everyone may take any free actions they like then begin the next turn.

As in the standard rules, nobody can attack anyone else's power structure in the first full turn. Any Illuminati that controls no Groups at any time after the end of the third full turn is eliminated.

Options

- **More Action!** Consider only attacks as each player's action during the Main Phase. Players may play Plot cards freely and spend action tokens for various purposes, but each player's action *only* ends following an attack attempt or when the player passes. This allows each player to do more at a time without telegraphing future actions, but loses some of the feel of the variant as the other players watch and wait.
- **Shorter Plots.** Plots lasting until the end of the player's turn end only last until the next time around the table, not the end of the Main Phase, limiting the effectiveness of the Plot card. This can produce a vicious, bloody game.
- **Time Limits.** Increase the speed of play by limiting each player's action to a specific time. We recommend giving each player two minutes to declare an action. The declared action can be completed even if time expires. Use shorter times to really speed things up.

Pyramid Review

Points in Space: Volume I: Starport Locations

Published by [Cumberland Games](#)

Written by **S. John Ross**



One 40 p. Main Book, one 103-page Map Book (both in PDF electronic format); \$12.95

Starport Locations is an electronic book full of settings for science fiction gaming. Two books full, really. The Main Book describes fifteen locations on some rundown space station. It includes schematic maps for each location, with notes scribbled in about what can be found there. The Map Book contains the same maps in tactical scale, overlaid with a hex grid.

The Main Book is a good read. It provides descriptions of restaurants, clubs, stores, a hotel, and even an adult theater along with brief sketches of several characters who frequent each location. Such workaday settings could easily be bland, but here they come to life. The locations are ripe to be inserted as encounters in science fiction RPG's, where they can remind players that there is more going on in the world than the PC's current adventure. The description of a fast food restaurant contains the delightful Random Food Tables. ("Tell me, Skato, do these chalky, blue strips taste funny to you?") Even Laxa's Holoporn Theater, which could not help but be salacious, offers unexpected possibilities; it turns out to be the center of a local ethnic enclave. The book contains few explicit suggestions about how to put PC's into these places, but GM's will have little trouble finding adventure and encounter possibilities. Ross is in good form, serving up characters and background with characteristic humor and aplomb.

The book includes no game statistics and should work fine with any system. When it mentions specific races and nations, careful room is left so that they may be replaced by whatever races and nations GM's already have in their campaigns. This may seem like a shortcoming to readers in need of detailed alien cultures or political situations, but the book makes no aim to provide those things. Where other game resources dwell at the level of cultural or political abstraction, *Starport Locations* is about particular and local color.

The Main Book ends with the Face of Enoch, an original card game for two to six players. A gambling game popular among spacers at Whomar's casino, Face of Enoch forces players to collect cards depicting the mouth, eyes, and tentacles of an alien god so fearsome that no card can depict his entire face. The deck consists of 54 cards and can be printed out onto cardstock. I've never had players roleplay in any detail the games that their characters play, but Face of Enoch tempts me to work it into a campaign and give it a try.

The Map Book may be used in conjunction with the Main Book to set tactical encounters in the locations described there, but it doesn't have to be. The map of the Cor/Kraylor Customs Checkpoint might serve for a security station on any border or even at the perimeter of a secure building, the map for Ela's Tomb might serve for a bar almost anywhere, and so on for the other maps.

Other than the Face of Enoch and the maps, there is no art in these books. This is not a great weakness, since the exposition is rich and the layout attractive.

The books are available only as electronic documents in PDF format, readily usable with Adobe's free Acrobat Reader.

The ReadMe file that accompanies the books explains that they are meant to be printed out and includes advice on how to print them nicely. Hardcopies of the book do look nice, even on a black and white printer. That said, the Main Book looks good on screen and needn't be printed to be enjoyed. I read it on my computer and will only print sections if I need them for running a game. Although I have no difficulties reading the book, it would have been nice to see hypertext links and a table of contents that took advantage of the electronic format.

The Main Book is \$9.95, the Map Book is \$7.95, or the two are package priced at \$12.95 for the pair. If you intend to print them, you'll have to shoulder printing costs in addition. At these prices, the books are *not* a bargain. Nevertheless, they are a solid value. GM's of *Traveller*, *Star Wars*, or Other-Spacefaring-Science-Fiction campaigns will find a lode of local flavor to put into their games, along with ideas for adventures and NPCs. In addition, anyone who plays out tactical combat in planet-bound or modern-day campaigns can probably find uses for the Map Book. If you think you might be in one of these groups, you can try a free sample which contains part of both books.

If you aren't a space gamer, you don't need these books. Yet *Starport Locations* is the first release in the Cumberland Games' All-Systems Library, a projected line of e-books providing resources that gamers can use in their game systems of choice. The series will include a book on medieval society and others on who knows what else, so expect it soon in a genre near you. If other releases match *Starport Locations* in quality, you will want to take a look.

-- P.D. Magnus

Pyramid Review

The Character Naming Sourcebook

Written by Sherrilyn Kenyon



Published by [Writer's Digest Books](#)

360 pages; \$18.99

One of the hardest things for a GM to do is come up with a name for all of his NPCs. He's spent all week getting the adventure ready, drawing maps, outlining scenarios, stating up the bad guys, and then it comes time to name them. Most of us just start pulling stuff off the top of our head. Jorn. Ismael. Guthar. Dar. Hey wait, I think that one's already taken.

While we gamers often come up with some pretty good ones, most of these names are bound to leave us a bit unsatisfied. I mean after all, most of them are just things we pulled out of the air, so what is there really to distinguish them? Thus, we can see that picking a good name is something we should put a bit of time into. The more meaning a name has and the more logical it is linguistically and culturally, the more it will satisfy both the GM and the players.

We can take a look at it from another standpoint. Stop for a second and think about the coolest bad guy you've ever known. Not just from games; let's try picking one from a movie. First one that comes to my mind is Darth Vader. Now granted, Darth Vader *was* cool, but do you think he would have been an iota as memorable (or *Star Wars* a fraction as successful) if he had been named Donald McKibble? It's a perfectly legitimate name, but it's pretty clear that it doesn't work. Darth Vader bears with it a wicked connotation, and much of this villain's character is gleaned directly from the resonance of his name alone. What's more is that his name actually has meaning -- "Dark Father" (if in fact my German lingual sources ring true). For those of us who understand that, it opens up even more insight (and spoils a certain crucial scene in Episode V).

But finding good names like that, which make sense and have meaning, isn't easy. Many of us have probably hit the multi-lingual dictionaries and baby naming books at one time, and we've all raided our favorite fiction pieces for cool names. But these sources are a bit scattered and unfocused. Fortunately there is a resource out there which provides just such a naming lexicon -- the *Character Naming Sourcebook* by Sherrilyn Kenyon.

This book has been around for a little bit, but it was originally penned as a resource for fiction writers, and these sorts of things tend to take their time seeping into the gaming community (if they do at all). In it, one will find a listing of names, complete with their meanings, in dozens of languages. Languages covered include Danish, English, Egyptian, Greek, Latin, Gaelic, Norse, Russian, Slavic, and many more. Need a good name for a servant? How about Cletus, Greek for "summoned." Need a name for a spirited tagalong squire? How about Faolan, Gaelic for "little wolf." How about a name for that dastardly villainess? Try Serilda, Teutonic for "armored battle-maiden."

The book opens with a thought-provoking intro on the general importance and significance of names, which should get a lot of GMs bubbles brewing by itself. It explores the depth of meaning in a name and the effect it has on an audience. The concepts of the Characternym, or a name that reveals inner meaning about a character, as well as the toponym and resonym, meaningful names for places and objects respectfully, are introduced and explained. The author then goes on to discuss the importance of naming by genre. Those covered include science fiction, romance, mystery, westerns, horror and fantasy, and action-adventure. In each, the author draws upon the wisdom of well noted writers in the field, such as Ben Bova, Ann Williams, and James Reasoner.

Overall this introduction, while short, is very worthwhile. Good naming advice isn't easy to come by in standard

gaming resources, and if you're looking in those "10,000 names for your baby" books, well, I doubt they've got much advice that gamers are really looking for. But of course the good part isn't the intro discussion, it's the massive list of over 20,000 names that follows that is truly valuable. There, a GM will find a name for every occasion, and though the players might not usually be completely privy to it, the names of your NPCs, from low to high, will be riddled with meaning. And what's perhaps greatest is that the names in your game can finally make a little bit of sense. Instead of naming a given group of people randomly, you can name them all from a particular language set. Their given names and surnames can follow a set pattern, and it will add a subtle element of consistency and realism to the campaign.

Like most books, there are a few drawbacks. The first is that very little attention is paid to surnames. Virtually all of the names given are first names, and although guidelines are given on how surnames are comprised with a few examples (virtually all, it seems, are the "X, son of Y" or "X of the land of Z" type), this material is spotty. So some of the lesser-known nomenclatures leave much to be desired in the way of surnames. Names are given for both men and women and a little bit is done here and there to discuss exactly how and why those names are given, but much is left out. For those GMs looking to make their games 100%, absolutely realistic, additional sources (such as history books, atlases [for place names], and foreign language dictionaries) might be necessary.

These limitations make the book a little harder to access for writers, the intended audience, but GMs will have a much easier time getting over them. If information is left out on surnames for a particular culture, a GM can just make up the rule. They're not as restricted by the necessity of realism, and they can turn this book into more of a guide for creating their own nomenclatures and lexicons.

Of course, this book can also be used by players, and it's certain that it will be a welcome addition to the table at character creation. Just having a list of 20,000 names is something that's of great value to any GM, and enough historical and linguistic information is provided by the book to turn it into a truly valuable resource.

-- *Jon Thompson*

Pyramid Review

Abomination Codex (for WitchCraft RPG)

Published by [Eden Studios](#)



Written by CJ Carella

176 pages; \$20.00

The *Abomination Codex* is the latest release from Eden Studios for the *WitchCraft* game. *WitchCraft* is the game of modern horror developed by CJ Carella, and it uses the Unisystem. This makes it compatible with *Armageddon* and *All Flesh Must Be Eaten*. This latest book offers new Character Types, new Associations, new Metaphysics, and a whole lot of different spirits to use in a *WitchCraft* campaign.

Since this is a game of modern horror, it has to contain vignettes to open each chapter. (I think that it's an amendment to the Constitution for which White Wolf lobbied.) All of the short fiction pieces are pretty good, my favorites among them would be the openings to Chapter Three (where a group of racists get punished for their crimes by a shape-shifting Feral) and Chapter Four (Which has an Immortal finally tracking down her adversary after sixty years only to watch him get assassinated by a Templar before she has a chance to kill him herself. Irony is always good in the modern horror genre).

After the introductions in Chapter One, Chapter Two presents some new rules and secret groups. A new Character Type is presented: the Lesser Supernatural. This is the type used to build a Feral Character. The new Associations are also summarized. The favorite secret society of conspiracy theorists everywhere is here, the Knights Templar. It would be pretty difficult to design a gameworld of many occult secret societies without eventually including the Templars. The Covenant of Legba is a large group of Voodoo practitioners. The Nomads are a group of wandering Ferals, humans who have had their souls merged with a nature spirit. This is what gives them the ability to shift between human and animal forms. There is a Covenant of Tainted individuals in this book as well, the Mockers. They are people who have been changed by a confrontation with the Mad Gods and yet have managed to hold on to their sanity. The last group presented is the Lodge of the Undying, a group of Atlantean Immortals who have been revised since their first appearance in *Armageddon* (back when it was published by Myrmidon).

After the overview of the new Associations, some new Qualities, Drawbacks and Skills are given. The most interesting of these is the Skin-Changer quality which allows a magician to change into a beast form without actually being a Feral, and the Familiar Quality which allows a magician to pay points to have a spirit allied with him. Later in the book there are write-ups for many different spirits, so it is nice to be able to have your Character have some of them bound to his service.

Chapter Three has rules for running two types of Inhumans, the Ferals and the True Immortals. As has already been mentioned, the Ferals are the shapeshifters of the *WitchCraft* world. Ferals can only be based on carnivorous mammals, but apart from that restriction they can be any variety. There are Wolf Ferals, Jaguar Ferals, Hyena Ferals. This allows you to play anything from the traditional werewolf to the shapeshifters of South America or Africa. The rules give an interesting twist to the shapeshifters of folklore. More importantly, it evens out your basic required monsters. Vampyres were presented in *Mystery Codex*, and now Ferals are presented here. Everyone should be happy. The True Immortals are the reincarnations of the last remnants of Atlantis. Anyone who has the previously published *Armageddon* will be familiar with them, but they have been updated and improved. The Child Drawback allows you to play an undying immortal who has to spend her centuries of life trapped in ungrowing body of a child and the Shettari Warrior quality is an interesting new variety of Immortal to unleash on the Cast.

Chapter Four gives more details on the five new Associations that were described earlier in the book. All of them were interesting and will give campaign ideas to any Chronicler. I thought that they were an improvement over the new Associations that were in *Mystery Codex*. Those were a bit uneven, all of these are very well done.

Chapter Five gives new Metaphysics rules, and there are a lot of them. The first thing described is the Keys of Solomon used by the Templars. These powers act as a sort of ÜberInvocation that gives the Templars some amazing powers. One Key even lets the Templar Cast Member hold her own against the Seraphim, some of the most powerful beings in the game universe. After that is a section on using Voodoo Magic in the *WitchCraft* game. CJ Carella developed the *WitchCraft* game, so you knew that eventually there was going to be voodoo in it. The Voodoo section also includes rules for Spirit Patrons, having a supernatural being (like the Loas and Orishas) grant powers to someone who might otherwise not have any metaphysical ability.

The Metaphysics Chapter also includes a section on Taint Powers. These are abilities fueled by Taint (the primal energy of the Mad Gods and their minions from the Outer Dimensions) instead of Essence (the primal energy of everything in our universe from cute fuzzy bunnies to the Dukes of Hell). The section can be used for running Mocker Cast Members or for detailing powers for the Mad Cultists that the Cast is eventually going to run into. The last section gives rules for the Atlantean Arcana, the metaphysical constructs that can be created by True Immortals with the maker Quality. Most of these will be familiar to Armageddon players, the energy blasting Essence Wands and the UFO like Thought Ships. There are also some new Arcana like the Crystal Skull.

The last chapter covers the Supernatural, and has write-ups for examples of every type of spirit in the *WitchCraft* game world. The four classic elementals are described, as well as a fifth Electricity Elemental. Four Nature Spirits are detailed, including Cockroach Spirits to creep out players in an urban campaign, Three types of zombies are presented; Astral Zombies which are enslaved spirits, Living Zombies which are the more realistic version of a voodoo zombie (the puffer fish/premature burial/abuse/brain washing variety), and the Undead Zombie which is the rotting walking corpse of fantasy and horror. The foot soldiers of Heaven and Hell are described, the Angelic Ethereals and the Fiends respectively. Another Ethereal, the Vengeance Ethereal, is also described. Two Tainted Spirits are presented, a Tainted Fire Elemental and the Wendigo (Which is a Tainted Feral). Finally, a new Mad God Cult is written up. This is the Cult of the Rending Shadow which worships Lle'Khor. A history of the cult is given, as well as statistics for Lle'Khor, its minions, and one of its high priests.

There are some new artists working on this book, and the illustrations in this supplement give the work a darker feel than either the *Mystery Codex* or the core book. The pieces by Juha Vuorma were especially dark and disturbing, which is what you want in a horror game. I didn't like the symbols presented for the five new Associations. They were a lot less iconic than the ones done for *Mystery Codex* or the core *WitchCraft* book. But if the only thing I don't like about a book is a minor graphic symbol that only appears once on the cover and once in the book, then I think that I have a pretty good product on my hands. The *Abomination Codex* is a good sourcebook for any modern supernatural game, but a vital necessity for anyone running *WitchCraft*.

-- Thom Marrion

American Arcadia: The Big Rock Candy Mountain

"The whole nation had been footloose too long, Heaven had been just over the next range for too many generations. Why remain in one dull plot of earth when Heaven was reachable, was touchable, was just over there? . . . He had a notion where home would turn out to be, for himself as for his father -- over the next range, on the Big Rock Candy Mountain, that place of impossible loveliness that had pulled the whole nation westward, the place where the fat land sweated up wealth and the heavens dropped lemonade."

-- Wallace Stegner, *The Big Rock Candy Mountain* (1943)

Et in America ego. There's a paradise somewhere in this land of ours, built on the dreams of tramps royal and singing schoolchildren alike. In this American Arcadia our national pastimes of getting and spending take a hike, so you don't have to. There, "the handouts grow on bushes, and you sleep out every night." It's the home of the Bluebird of Happiness, it's the pie in the sky, it's where the streets are paved with gold. In our continuing illumination of the American mythology, what better place to paint than no place at all? So come with me, we'll go and see the Big Rock Candy Mountain.

*"One evening as the sun went down
And the jungle fire was burning,
Down the track came a hobo hiking
And he said 'Boys, I'm not turning,
I'm headed for a land that's far away
Beside the crystal fountain,
So come with me, we'll go and see
The Big Rock Candy Mountain.'"*

-- Harry "Haywire" McClintock, "The Big Rock Candy Mountain" (1928 recording)

The irksome thing about oral history is that nobody ever writes it down until it's too late. During the 1893-1897 Depression, there may have been a million people "on the bum" to one extent or another. In an era before Social Security -- and before Social Security cards -- and when the railroads shipped millions of tons along millions of miles of unguardable railway track -- a man, or an idea, could become completely anonymous. Even a whole mountain could disappear, or, as it happened, appear without anyone realizing it. As a result, the actual origin of the Big Rock Candy Mountain itself is probably unknowable. Like any good myth, it's how Never Always Was. We don't know, for sure, if the hoboes actually called America's paradise the Big Rock Candy Mountain before its realization in song. To paraphrase the Zen koan, is the Big Rock Candy Mountain a legend about a folk song, or a folk song about a legend?

As far as my (admittedly limited) folk musicological resources can stretch, I'm pretty sure that Harry "Haywire" McClintock wrote the standard version of "The Big Rock Candy Mountain," the one adapted by Burl Ives into a perennial children's favorite. (Remember, kids, they're "peppermint trees," not "cigarette trees.") But even I was able to dig up at least four major versions of the song, and plenty of minor variants. McClintock was an orphan from Tennessee who ran away to join the circus, and hit the rails at age 16 (during that 1890s depression), where he became a kind of "court jester" or minstrel to the hobo gangs, singing and playing guitar. I can't say for sure, but my sense is that it was then, desperate to keep the goodwill and interest of people who were, themselves, the original "desperate men," that he revealed the story of the Big Rock Candy Mountain. McClintock went on to serve in the Spanish-American War, gold-rush to the Klondike, work as a railroad brakeman himself, and eventually host a children's radio program on San Francisco's KFRC. In 1928, as far from the 1893 Depression as he could get, he recorded his song -- ironically, when he tried to enforce copyright, the judge refused to allow it, saying it was "a folk song and in the public domain." An interesting fate for a song about the abolition of private property.

"The bluebirds no longer sing by the lemonade springs: The Big Rock Candy Mountain Resort on the Sevier River near Marysvale, Utah, is bankrupt. The sulphur- and chocolate-colored mountain, celebrated in a song written by Harry McClintock and sung by Burl Ives, attracted visitors from around the world who during the 1950s drank its mineral-rich spring water, rumored to have healing powers."

-- "Reality Intrudes on Big Rock Candy Mountain," *Western Roundup* (Oct. 17, 1994)

Another element briefly intrudes into the Big Rock Candy Mountain, the Mountain itself. This brown-and-yellow rounded pyramid rises out of the Utah desert roughly midway between Zion National Park and Mt. Nebo, Utah. Its name comes from the plentiful deposits of yellow and pink rhyolite (volcanic granite) crystals around the area -- and from the folk song. The name came after the first automobile roads went through the Sevier Valley, well after McClintock wrote the song. However, it is interesting that the springs here were "rumored to have healing powers" -- would those be the "lemonade" (or, in a decidedly not-Burl-Ives version, "rock-and-rye") springs, or the "crystal fountain"?

Crystals, fountains, paradises in the desert Waste Land -- is the Big Rock Candy Mountain the Grail Castle, where "each knight ate whatever food he deemed best, and as much as he wanted" as it magically appeared on his plate? How, precisely, does the Big Rock Candy Mountain, as an American paradise, tie in with the "Zion" the Mormons found in Utah? Of course, ever since the Puritans settled in to build their "shining city on the hill" -- or even before, when Columbus thought he had discovered the Garden of Eden in America -- our national dream has been the Garden in the Wilderness, the perfect city. Chicago's motto, *Urbs in Hortis*, means "City in the Garden," and the Columbian Exposition (commemorating the 400th anniversary of this voyage to Eden) featured the White City -- a model of urban perfection that became the Emerald City of Oz, the great American Utopia of 1900.

*"And all larks that are so couth
Fly right down into man's mouth
Smothered in stew, and thereupon
Piles of powdered cinnamon:
Every man may drink his fill
And needn't sweat to pay the bill."*

-- *The Land of Cockaigne* (from a 12th century French ballad)

Of course, the story is even older than that. The German peasants had their own paradises, Schlaraffenland and Lubberland, where bread and cheese grew on trees and beer foamed up from wells. The minnesingers told tales of the Venusberg, the hollow mountain ruled by the Goddess of Pleasure where travelers roistered in endless debauches of rich food and orgiastic sex. The story of Cockaigne, the "land of cake" where pigs walked about already roasted and wine flowed in the streams, shows up in a symphony by Elgar, a painting by Breughel, and poetry in English and French stretching back to the 1100s. Cockaigne's rivers of wine flow back to Hesiod's 7th-century B.C. *Works and Days*, which tells of Saturn's kingdom somewhere to the West, where men "lived as if they were gods, their hearts free from sorrow, and without hard work or pain," and "the fruitful earth yielded its abundant harvest to them of its own accord, and they lived in ease and peace upon the lands with many good things." Another source, even older, is the Garden of Eden, where Adam and Eve could "eat of any fruit" and did no labor for it. Also in the Bible, we find Zion to be "a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey;" Isaiah (roughly contemporary with Hesiod) places the earthly paradise in "God's holy mountain."

But there's another side of the Mountain. Paradise is, after all, a place you go [when you die](#). It's a land of the dead, an Elysian Field with "a lake of stew and whiskey too." In "The Dying Hobo" and "The Wabash Cannonball" the hobo singer hops the last freight to a land suspiciously like our own Big Rock Candy Mountain, where (for example) "the handouts grow on bushes and everything is bright." In hoodoo tradition, ghosts like sweets, tobacco, and liquor -- that's the Mountain, all right. And it might not even be Heaven, after all. The Venusberg is, after all, a hollow mountain ruled by a [demonic goddess](#). Isn't it kind of creepy that the "air is pure and bright" *inside* a mountain? McClintock, at one point, said that the song was a parody of the "fairy tales" (brrr) or "ghost stories" (double brrr) that hoboes would spin to lure young boys onto the road. There's a variant of the song, called "The Appleknocker's Lament" that casts the Big Rock Candy Mountain as akin to the Paradise promised the Children's Crusaders, or the song sung by the Pied Piper. Perhaps that good old mountain music isn't so good, after all.

*"I'll show you the bees in the cigarette trees,
The big rock candy mountains,
The [chocolate](#) heights where they give away kites*

*And the sody-water fountains,
The lemonade springs where the bluebird sings,
The marbles made of crystal.
We'll join the band of Dangerous Dan
Who carries a sword and a pistol."*

-- attr. to Wheaton "Skin" Brewer, "The Appleknocker's Lament" (1927)

Whether Heaven, or Hell, or both, the Big Rock Candy Mountain deserves a place -- or two -- in any game of American fantasy, of American myth. For games of a high mythic level, it can actually exist; if you're playing the [Paul Bunyan](#) Pantheon game I've mentioned earlier, it can be the Grail or the Valhalla for our American heroes. In an America-centered *In Nomine* game is it a Dream battleground between Beleth and Blandine? One of Eli's projects, hijacked by Nybbas over the KFRC airwaves through the insidious machinations of Burl Ives? A stronghold for Haagenti, or a killing zone for Marc, or both? A "happily ever after" land for Christopher and the Angels of Children? For even wider-eyed "juvenile fantasy" gaming, supernatural child PCs can emerge from the Big Rock Candy Mountain to help kids in trouble across the Depression-era West.

Or, of course, you can really throw your players off, and sneak the Big Rock Candy Mountain into a "straight" game, either as a one-off comedic note or as a cave opening out into High Weirdness. Our enigmatic [ultraterrestrial Airship](#) emerges in 1897, around the same time as the song may have; was the Big Rock Candy Mountain an attempt at a Belle Epoque [Faerie](#) hill? You could build the Big Rock Candy Mountain with a pretty simple nanotech spill; was there a UFO crash in Utah in 1894? Does the [Templar map](#) encoded by John Dee reveal "God's Holy Mountain" as the source of lemonade springs? Are hobo code marks Enochian sigils? Did Sir Walter [Raleigh's occult tobaccos](#) come from America's hidden cigarette trees? What, exactly, is in the Warehouse 23 candy machines? It's fun to play where the Nephites pray, where you find the Grail in an Oz lunch pail, where the American Dream comes with free ice cream -- it won't be tame if you set your game in the Big Rock Candy Mountain.

Murphy's Rules



by John Kovalic

Murphy's Rules



Murphy's Rules



Dork Tower!



Dork Tower!



Sometimes, I Hate Me

I don't know about the rest of you players, but I'll often create characters that I specifically dislike . . . or, at least, that have traits and flaws I specifically dislike. It's part of the challenge of gaming for me, I guess; the natural tendency for many people is to play someone who's more or less like you. It's easy to play, say, you with a ray gun, or you with a cowboy hat. But trying to create someone who's actively different from the way you think, and doing that character justice, is a big part of the fun.

Then again, in high school I did some acting, even receiving the prestigious "Honey Baked Spiral Cut" award.

Now, playing someone with a different mindset from your own is separate (in my mind) from playing someone who's Chaotic Yahoo. One is an attempt to try creating a character who is different, the other is an excuse to see what's flammable in the campaign world. Playing someone different doesn't have to be playing someone who's worse, or more evil/selfish/whatever; you can play someone who's *too* good/nice/etc. For example, in the most recent campaign I was in, I played someone who was *so* good, he was constantly on the cusp of being a danger to himself and to others. But he was internally logical and consistent; in essence, he believed in the golden rule (do unto others as you would have them do unto you), but he also thought nothing about sacrificing himself for the Greater Good. So he didn't have many qualms about sacrificing others for the greater good, since he would expect others to do the same thing.

(Of course, you can also play someone who's more evil/selfish/whatever from you . . . but then I personally make sure to understand *why* they do what they do, so I don't fall into the trap of acting like a fiend just because it's easy.)

I also like playing characters who have flaws and characteristics that I don't like, but want to work towards overcoming. Almost all of the various character disadvantages provide grist for this mill: alcoholism, overconfidence, cowardice, etc. It can be a long and meaningful voyage to play a character who goes from being someone that doesn't look out for anyone but himself, to someone who can actually start to care. But in addition to disadvantages you might want to overcome, why not look at *advantages*? In a horror one-shot one time, I played a C-list horror writer hack with ten levels of Fearless. In essence, he was an awful writer who investigated the supernatural and unknown because he wanted to be scared once in his life (it's difficult to write horror if you've never known fear). It enabled me to play a character who was much less careful and discerning than I am, while trying to overcome an advantage (yet not die in the process).

If you're going to play someone wildly different from the way you are (or your normal characters tend to act), you may want to consider telling your GM your character's philosophy as best you can. Of particular use would be how he would react to some "standard" situations (being trapped, being tempted with an "irresistible" offer, etc.). Those reactions are subject to change depending on the exact situation, of course. But it can be useful if, say, you've always played characters who would specifically investigate something if forbidden by an authority figure to do so, and this time (against the GM's expectations and plot requirements) you're playing someone who *always* bows to authority.

Likewise, if you're playing someone who's not particularly likeable, make sure your gaming group and compatriots understand that you're just flexing your acting muscles . . . and *definitely* make sure they understand (if at all appropriate within the game) what motivates your character. It's one thing to play a mercenary that will sell out his associates for the highest bid, and makes that known; it's another to play someone who'll sell them out when this fact becomes known as they're all being devoured by Dr. Foom's deathgeese.

If your character does act against the rest of the party, hopefully everyone's mature enough that they won't take it personally. And if they shoot your character in the knees because they don't trust him . . . don't take that personally either.

* * *

As an aside, I've found myself stymied a bit in some of these "player's advice" sort of columns. On the one hand, I want to provide examples, many of them personal; on the other, I'm wary about boring you all. "I don't care about your

character," as the button goes.

Feel free to start a thread over in the Pyramid discussion board about the amount of detail (or lack thereof) you all care about my ramblings. Or, as ever, feel free to [write me](#).

* * *

Oh, and it's most disheartening to get in a public forum and say, "Dang it! My GM friend Dennis moved to Tampa! I'm all alone, and it stinks!," and have four people write and say things like, "Hey! Can you tell Dennis that we'd like him to GM for us!" It's like the gamerly equivalent of ambulance chasers. Where are you all in Tallahassee, huh?!? Maybe one of you could move *here* . . .

* * *

By the by, I'm looking to possibly do a Valentine's Day theme issue for February 9th. Please feel free to submit articles, adventures, or any of the features (Supporting Cast, Adventure Pizza, and so on) having to do with love, relationships, etc. (Of course, you'll want to do that soonish . . . folks who are considering submitting may want to visit the Pyramid discussion board for updates; when I have a full issue, I'll post something there.)

-- *Steven Marsh*

* * *

*Last week's answer: **Corax**, p. 54.*

(Five stars) "Men have fought and laid claim to fame, fortune, and victory. Countless battles of epic proportions have been waged across the same of time from the age of pharaohs to the 20th century . . .when weekend warriors began to recreate the conquests of the past using armies of miniature figures doing combat in basements and garages."



by [Rick LaRue](#)

I started painting lead figures a long time ago . . . something like fifteen years or so. Over the years, I've made lots of mistakes, but I've learned something (or at least tried to) from each one. Every chance I get, I try to see how other people do things, to see if their techniques and tricks can teach me anything. And they almost always can, if not how to do something, then how *not* to do something. Keep that in mind while you read this, because this is how I do things, but not necessarily how things *must* be done. You may find it very basic. You may find you don't agree with my ideas. Or you may find a few things you hadn't thought of before. In any case, take from it what you will and discard the rest. Hopefully it will help you become a better painter.

Buying Figures

Buy only well-made, well-cast, detailed figures. There are lots of different companies, some better than others. I like Ral Partha and Reaper figures. Games Workshop/Citadel also make very nice figures. Many people hate Company X and swear by Company Y and they'll tell you you're wrong for not agreeing with them. Ignore them. Buy and paint what you think is cool. I've seen figures from every company that I wouldn't buy with someone else's money and I've seen some beautiful figures from no-name companies.

Keep an eye out for the sculptors you like. Most companies list the artist and you can often find other figures you like and avoid the figures you don't by looking at the name. Take that last piece of advice with a grain of salt. Everyone has an off day and just because one figure an artist sculpted wasn't to your liking, doesn't mean all their work is bad.

Buying Paints

Since the whole point of painting your figures is for them to look good, the quality of paint you use will make a big difference. Good paint will have a thick, even consistency. It will apply and dry evenly and won't cake. Paint that is too thin or too thick will not cover properly or will clog some areas and leave others uncovered.

You want quality over quantity. You'll be amazed at just how little paint you really need, and overbuying will waste your money and your paint. Paint dries. That may seem obvious, but it dries *in* the bottle too. Eventually, you'll go to open a bottle or jar of paint and find nothing but a hard pile of useless paint. Sealing the paint jars and storing them in a cool place will help prevent this, but it's inevitable. Remember to clean the tops of your paint jars before closing them. This will allow them to form a better seal and help prevent drying out. Don't buy the industrial size bottle of paint unless you plan to use it all within a few months. Also, don't buy every color under the sun right away. You need the basics, but buy what you need for the figure(s) you're painting now. When you get a new figure that requires a special color, go to the store and buy that color. It's a real drag to think you have everything you need only to find half your paint collection has turned into a desiccated mess of chalk. I've had paints last years, but I've also had them last only a few months. Be warned.

Another hazard is separation. Sometimes the pigment of the paint separates out and you're left with colored water. Mixing the paint works occasionally, but most times the paint is dead. Time to buy new paint. Beware of this from stores that stock a lot of paint that sits on the shelves for a long time. This is a symptom of poor quality paint, but can also happen to the best brands.

So what are the basic colors? To start, you need about ten colors: black, white, medium gray, flesh tone, medium green, medium brown, yellow, red, beige or tan, medium blue, and silver. This is about the minimum I like to have. All of these can be combined to make a much larger array of colors. In practice, I don't usually blend colors unless I have to. I like to use colors right out of the jar. Painting figures is about touching up repeatedly, and trying to match a custom color is nearly impossible. You can always make large batches of mixed colors, but that tends to use up your basic colors, forcing you to buy more paint. If you have to buy more paint anyway, why not just get the color you want and avoid the bother of mixing? I'm sure many people will disagree and that's okay, but I like to keep things as simple as possible.

Where can you get good paint? A good hobby, craft, or gaming store will usually carry a decent selection of water-based acrylic paints for about a dollar for a one- or two-ounce jar. *Do not* use plastic model paints! They are almost always oil based and they will not work the same as water based paints for lead figure painting.

Buying Brushes

No matter how good a painter you are, if you don't have a good set of brushes, you aren't going to be able to do your best work. The old adage "It's a poor artist who blames his tools" doesn't apply here, but a new one does: "It's a stupid artist who doesn't invest in a good set of brushes." A good rule of thumb is: if it comes in a package set, don't buy it. I've found I use three types of sable brushes. A small, fine-tipped brush for detail (size 5/0 or 10/0 Liner or Script); a slightly larger round brush for covering larger areas (size 000 Round) and a flat, medium-sized brush (size 1 or 2 Shader) for Dry Brushing. The last is a personal preference since Dry Brushing (see below) can be done with either of the other types. You may also find having a few other brushes of various sizes will come in handy from time to time.

It's important to clean your brushes properly. The better you take care of them, the longer they'll last. While painting, I use a small cup of water to clean paint from the brush before changing colors or switching brushes. Change the water in your cup frequently, especially when Washing (see below) to avoid muddying your colors. *Never* leave paint on a brush you aren't using. That's a surefire way to destroy it. Some people will tell you to leave your brushes bristles down in a cup of water while painting; I've found this can deform the brush and ruin them. Clean off the excess paint and let them lie off to the side until you need them again. When you're done working, clean all the brushes you used with light soap and cool water. When all the paint is gone, gently reform the brushes, replace the plastic tube that covers the bristles and store them bristles up in a safe place.

Tools

Brushes aren't the only things you need to paint. A craft knife is essential for removing flashing, cleaning up molding lines, and a million other things. Make sure you have extra sharp blades for it, too. A good flat file for filing bases and a few small files of different shapes for getting at casting imperfections on the figure are also useful. Some people like clips and vices for holding figures without touching them with fingers, and magnifying glasses for seeing detail.

Glue is another must. I use three types: Crazy Glue, Epoxy, and Elmer's Glue. Crazy Glue and Elmer's Glue are the typical glues everyone has been using since kindergarten. Epoxy is a different story. I use the type that has to be mixed before it will dry. It's messy, dries too fast, and is hard to work with, but it hardens like solid steel! There's nothing better than Epoxy for assembling metal figures (see below).

For years I used Crazy Glue to mount figures to just about any hard, non-porous surface. I've changed my mind about this. Over the years, I've started to see more and more of my figures separate from their bases when using Crazy Glue. So now, I use Epoxy for mounting, even if it's more of a pain to use. I just try to mount as many figures as I can before the Epoxy mixture dries. *Warning:* Do not get mixed Epoxy on your hands or anything of value. Trust me, it's

not pretty.

Lighting is a very important tool. Good light, at the correct angle, can make the difference between a well-painted figure and a garish mess of unrecognizable colors. Harsh, bright light is as bad as dim light. You need a cool, soft, non-fluorescent light source that can be directed on what you're painting. I like using one or two drafting lamps on my workbench in an otherwise dark room.

Speaking of workbenches, where you paint can make a big difference. I dream of a large secluded workbench with a clean surface where all my paints, tools, and supplies are within easy reach, a comfortable chair, proper lighting, and maybe a good stereo so I can have tunes playing in the background. That's not easy to achieve. For the most part, all you need is a clean space on a table with good lighting. Put some newspaper down to protect the surface. Spread out your supplies and get to work. As you become more serious, you can figure out something more permanent. If you end up using the kitchen table, make sure you clean up when you're done. There's no better way to aggravate spouses, roommates, or parents than by leaving your painting stuff lying around. Worse, if you leave it where anyone can get to it, there's a good chance something bad will happen. And of course we all know, no one is as careful with our precious masterpieces as we are. All it takes is someone dropping a nearly completed figure to ruin hours of work.

Cleaning

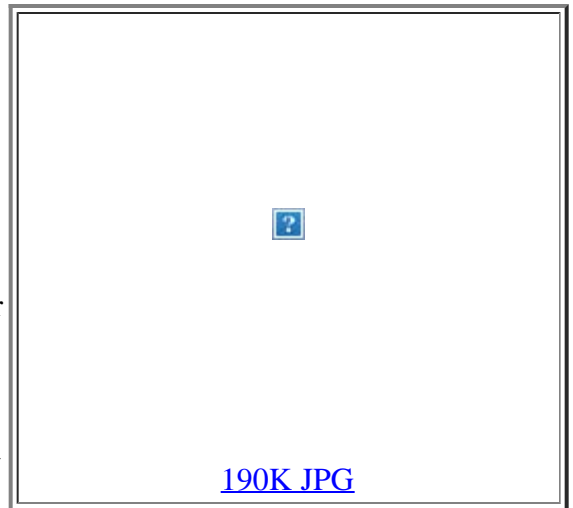
No matter how well-cast a figure is, it will probably need to have the flashing removed. Flashing is the extra metal left over during casting. A good sharp hobby knife or small file can be used, and if done right will be impossible to detect after it's painted. Make sure you file the base so it is flat and can be easily glued to your choice of mounting bases.

The next step is to wash the figure. This is not to be confused with "washing," which is a type of finish detailing I'll describe later. This type of washing is to clean the figure with soap and water to remove oils and grit the figures pick up during casting. Dish washing detergent works well. Gently wash and towel dry the figure, then let the figure completely dry overnight in a safe place.

Priming

Next you have to "prime" the figure. I can't stress how important this step is. Some people neglect to prime their figures and end up with thin spots where the metal of the figure shows through, giving the paint a metallic look. Primer or base coats provide an even painting surface to which other layers can be easily applied.

Priming can be done using any of several different colors and is as simple as putting a light base coat of paint or primer on the figure. I've heard of people using black, dark gray, light gray, white, and even red to prime their figures. Experimentation will tell you what works best for you. As a guideline, dark colors make for darker figures and may be harder to cover with some colors. On the other hand, there are some shortcuts you can use with dark base coats to make figures look more detailed without requiring a lot of work. Light, neutral colors (e.g. white, light gray, etc.) are my personal favorites. They are easy to cover with any color and don't darken the colors you put on it. While some people have claimed to have good success with red primer, I won't use it. Red is notorious for being difficult to cover with almost anything other than black.



Once you've chosen a primer color, you need to apply it. Application can be done by spray or by brush. Personal preferences aside, both methods work well. Brushing requires more work and can leave streaking if not done carefully. Spraying works well, but over-spraying is a real hazard and can remove fine detail from figures by covering them up. Try both and see which works best for you, but in either case, use a consistent coat that covers the entire figure with a thin, even layer of paint.

Mounting

I like to mount my figures. Most figures come with very small bases that are hard to grasp. I use 1" ceramic hexagonal tiles. You can get them at most tile stores in various colors for less than \$10 per 12" square sheet (about 144 tiles). They're cheap, nearly indestructible and look nice. For larger, diorama-style bases you can use whatever seems right: pieces of wood, large ceramic tiles, or a bunch of small ones glued together.

In most cases, I'll mount figures before I paint them, but after I prime them. It gives me a better way to manipulate the figure while painting. I can also hold the figure without touching any of the painted surfaces. Exceptions to this rule are when mounting makes getting to certain areas of the figure with a brush impossible. In that case, you just have to make due with the figure's own base, or clips.

Mounting is also a part of finishing the figure. A good base can enhance even the most well-painted figure. You can add flocking, small stones, lichen, and many other things to give the figure a more realistic look. Just apply a thin coat of Elmer's Glue and add the extras of your choice. Let it dry and you go from having a well-painted warrior standing on a plain base to having a well-painted warrior standing amidst the rubble of a ruined castle.

Drying

I always let *any* layer of paint dry over night. It allows the paint time to set and adhere itself to the surface. You also avoid mixing colors by accident. It may end up taking a long time to finish a figure, but you can work on several different figures at once without rushing. I also find that waiting a day gives me a better perspective to look at the figure with. Painting takes concentration and it's easy to miss things when your eyes start to go buggy from focusing on something as small as most figures. If you come back fresh the next day, you'll spot places you missed or where your hand wasn't as steady as you thought.

Assembling

You've heard the old saying "Some assembly required," right? Well the same is true for some figures. Because of casting restrictions, packaging, and various other reasoning, some figures have to be put together either before or after painting. The hardest part of this (besides figuring out what goes where) is getting all the pieces to fit together properly.

All the pieces are created using separate molds, and try as they might, miniature companies can't always get flawless molds. This leaves use with the equivalent of fitting a square peg into a round hole.

I don't think I've come across a single multi-piece figure that fit together without some filing. Accept that now, and you'll be a happier person in the long run. It's not as bad as it might seem. The biggest hazard is overdoing it. File a little at a time, checking the fit often. Also, think of the problem from both sides. Is it easier/better/faster to make the hole bigger or the peg smaller? Which approach will make a better-looking finished product? Often, it's a little of both.

What needs to be filed? If you're lucky, it'll be obvious. Otherwise, here's a suggestion. Try marking one of the pieces with ink where it will touch the other piece. If you do it before the ink dries, you'll see little spots on the unmarked piece where the ink of the marked piece touched it. That's where you start. File those a little bit and try again. This takes patience, but the results are pretty good. You can usually get a good fit after a few tries.

"Well, now it fits together, but it has these big gaps between the pieces!" This happens a lot, but it can be fixed. There are all kinds of ways to do this, from excessive filing to melted lead filler. I like doing something a bit less extreme. Since you're going to use epoxy to glue them together anyway, why not make use of it as filler as well? Like I said

above, epoxy dries like solid steel. With the proper application of a little extra epoxy (liquid or putty), you can fill in the gaps. When the epoxy dries, prime it (it might take a few coats) and paint it like the rest of the figure. You can even add some custom details to help blend the area into the whole. Afterwards, the gaps will either be reduced greatly, or completely unnoticeable. Problem solved.

Okay, so it's not that easy. But with a little practice, you really can do wonders. I had a dragon figure that no matter how hard I tried I could not get its head to go on right. If I wiggled it one way I had a huge gash on one side. Wiggle it the other and the gash switched sides. Filing didn't help (if I filed any more I start losing an unacceptable amount of detail). In the end, I glued the head as best I could so there were small gaps on both sides and filled them in with excess epoxy. Once I painted them, you could hardly tell they existed at all.

Remember not to gleefully assemble your figures right away. Think about how you're going to paint them. Sometimes, adding a piece will make painting some part of the figure very hard or even impossible. Hold off. Add as much as you can without making your life difficult. Then paint everything (even the pieces that aren't attached) and add the last few pieces at the end. This will undoubtedly require touch up, but it's better to touch up a small area than to be unable to paint part of your figure.

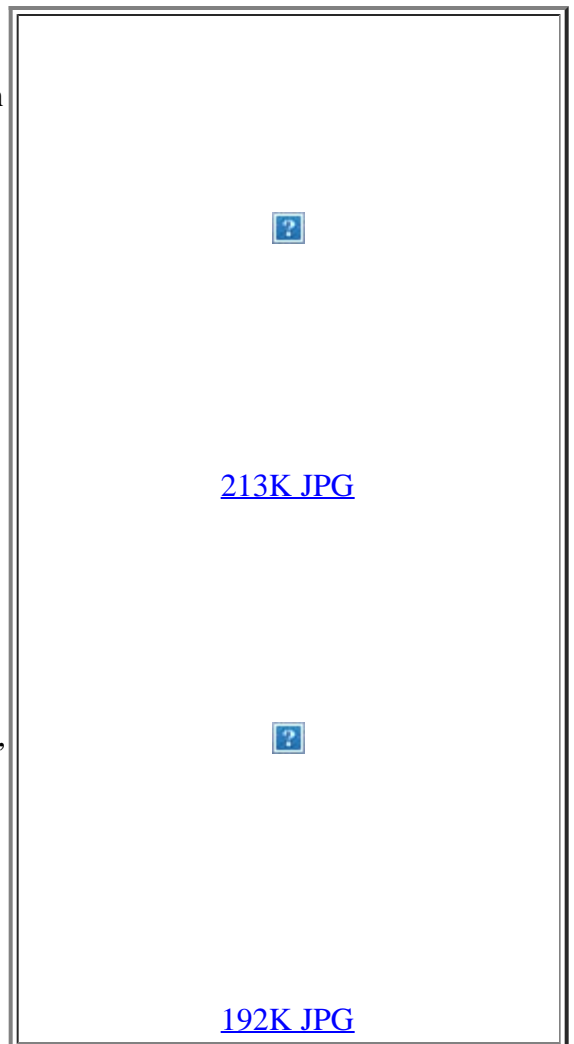
Painting

Painting is more than slapping some paint on a surface with a dripping brush. It takes a certain amount of planning to get the results you want. Color selection is extremely important to a finished figure. A poorly chosen collection of colors will take away from even the most masterfully painted figure. Try to pick colors that not only compliment each other, but the subject matter of the figure as well. You want the figure to be eye-catching, but not offensive.

Begin painting as if you were dressing the figure. That is, from the lowest part of the figure (usually the skin) outwards. Apply the paint evenly, being careful not to leave streaks or pools of paint. Paint carefully, but don't be overly concerned with perfection, at least not at this point. The object at first is to put a layer of paint on the major features of the figure. Fine detail (e.g. belt buckles, buttons, eyes, lips, etc.) will come later.

You will make mistakes. Always. No matter how good you become, you will make mistakes. That's okay. Since all we're trying to do is define the parts of the figure, you can go back and touch things up. Take your time. Take breaks. As I mentioned above, a break can often allow you to see places where a little bit of the brown from the belt got on the blue of the tunic. Carefully touch these up. It may take several attempts, but eventually, you'll have a fully painted figure.

Some people will tell you to pick a feature on a figure, a tunic or shirt for example, and paint it to completion (e.g. apply the paint, wash it, dry brush it and add the finishing detail) and then move on to next feature to be painted. I don't agree with this approach. I prefer to paint everything (except fine details) first, touch it up so it's as close to perfect as I can get it, and move on to the finishing techniques (like washing, dry brushing, etc.). Why? Well, if I spend a lot of time painting and finishing some part of a figure and later, while working on another feature, I get paint on it, I'll have a much harder time fixing my mistake because I'll have to redo all the finishing as well as the basic painting.



Finishing Techniques

By this point, you should have a fully painted (minus the details) but essentially dull-looking figure. Right on schedule! This is where you start finishing you figure. There are five basic finishing techniques you can use to make your dull painted figure come alive. You don't have to use all of them. You don't have to use any of them. But the better you understand their use, the better you'll be at knowing which to use when and how much to make the best figure you can.

Washing

Washing adds depth and realism to a figure by adding shadows. To wash a figure, take a darker shade of a color and water it down until it's thin, but still has a deep, rich color. In some cases, you can use straight black paint (I call this black-washing), but this will often darken a figure greatly. While I use paint, you can also use inks to accomplish the same thing. Paints tend to dry with a flatter finish than inks, which tend to have a slightly glossy look when dry, but this depends on the ink as well. The correct combination of paint and ink washes can really make a figure stand out. Try both and see what you feel most comfortable with.

Apply the wash to the figure by brushing it on, but allow the mixture to pool slightly in the crevices and deeper areas. If the pooling is too great, use a dry brush to draw off some of the wash. As the wash dries, the pigments will settle in the deeper areas of the figure creating a shadowing effect. You may have to apply a few washes to get the colors you want.

Other interesting effects can be created by repeatedly washing a figure with gradually darkening colors. Another trick is to mix metallic and non-metallic colors to create a hybrid, which works great on jewelry, weapons and armor. Also, remember to be careful when washing dark colors next to light colors.

Outlining

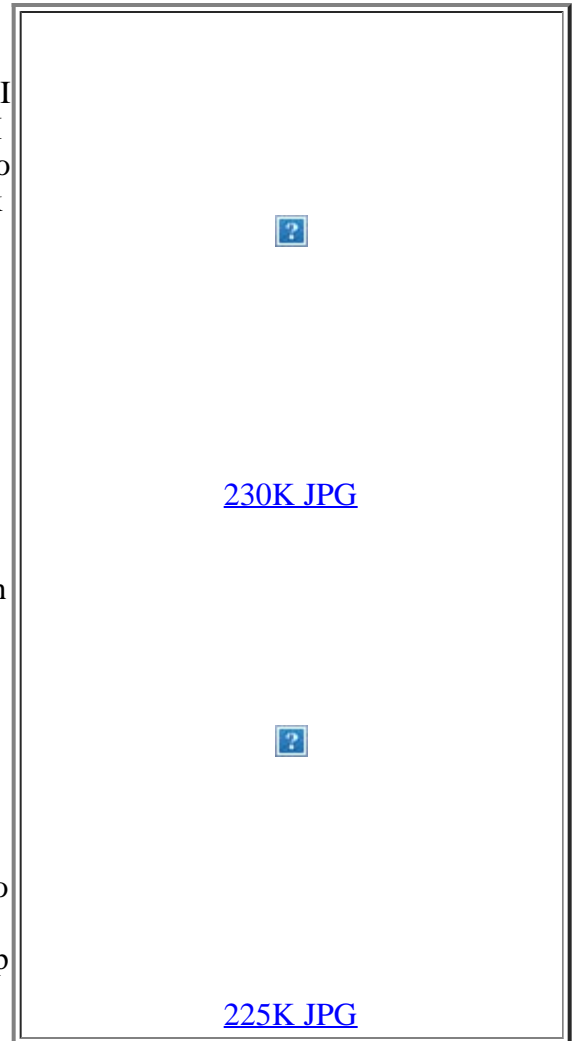
Outlining is a variation of washing. It adds a very vivid shadowing effect to figures by delineating where different areas come together. For instance, where the belt meets the chain hauberk. This creates dark shadows that help to emphasize the details of the figure.

To outline, carefully apply a heavy wash of black paint or ink (i.e. a blackwash) to the areas of a figure where two details come together. Be careful to keep the pooling to a minimum. Use a normal wash on the rest of the figure and you'll be amazed at how good the figure looks.

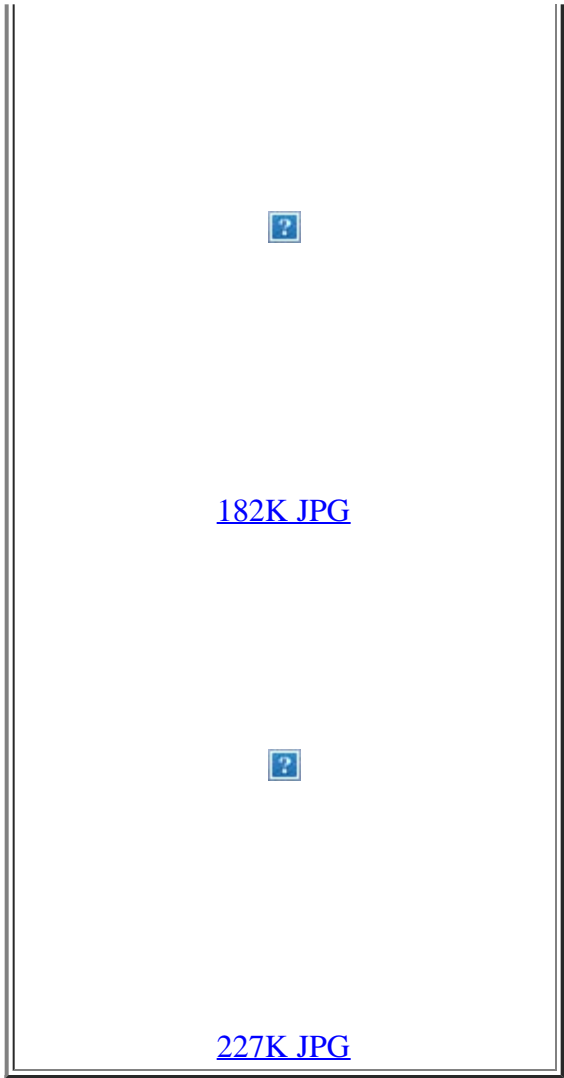
This is where using black primer can save some time. If you are careful when you apply the basic colors to your figure, you can allow the black primer to show through at the detail intersections, effectively outlining the figure. In my opinion, this doesn't look as realistic as true outlining, but it is a time saver and doesn't look all that bad.

Dry Brushing

Dry brushing is just what it sounds like; you use a dry brush to highlight a figure. The brush is "dry" because most of the paint has been removed. The goal is to highlight the raised parts of a figure with a lighter shade of paint.



To use this technique, put a little paint on a brush and wipe it on a paper towel until almost all of the paint has come off. Then, gently brush the raised parts of the figure until a small amount of paint has covered them. It's best to use a slightly lighter shade of paint than the color your painting over, but you can also restore an original color that has been darkened by washing.

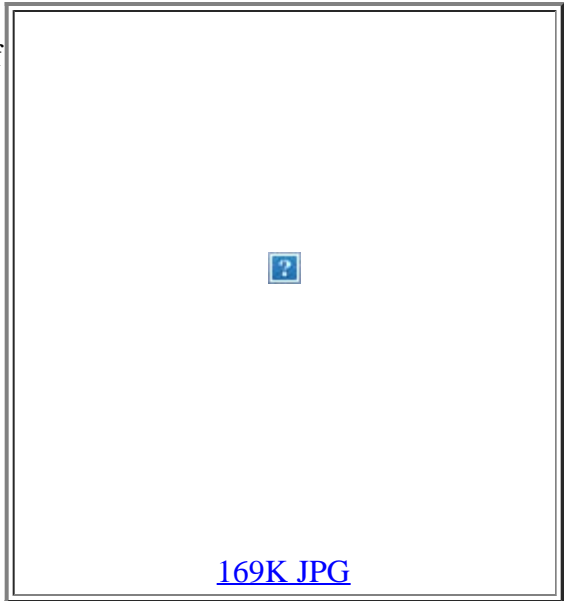


Detailing

This is the most challenging part of painting. It requires a steady hand and a good eye. I save this for last since most of the fine details would be lost if you accidentally wash or dry brush over them. Fine details include eyes, lips, buttons, buckles, studs, gems, rings and other tiny features that require only a small dab of paint.

Start by steadying your arms; place both elbows in front of you, touching the top of the table. Hold the figure in one hand and your brush in the other. Then brace your brush hand against your other hand so they move as one. Put a tiny bit of paint on the tip of your brush and dab it on the figure. The trick is to be confident and deliberate in your brush strokes. Don't hesitate, but don't overreact either. This may take a few tries. If you make a mistake, touch it up and try again.

Remember, find the easiest way to achieve your goals and use them. If you can dry brush the details on some parts of your figures, fine. Sometimes it's easier to be a bit messy when you detail and then touch up around it. The end result will still look like you have the steadiest hand in the world.



A note about eyes: eyes are tough. No doubt about it. I tend to paint the eyes white (or an appropriate color) before painting the face. Then I carefully paint around them with the flesh color. When I apply the wash, I wash right over

them and then go back and draw off the wash with a dry brush.

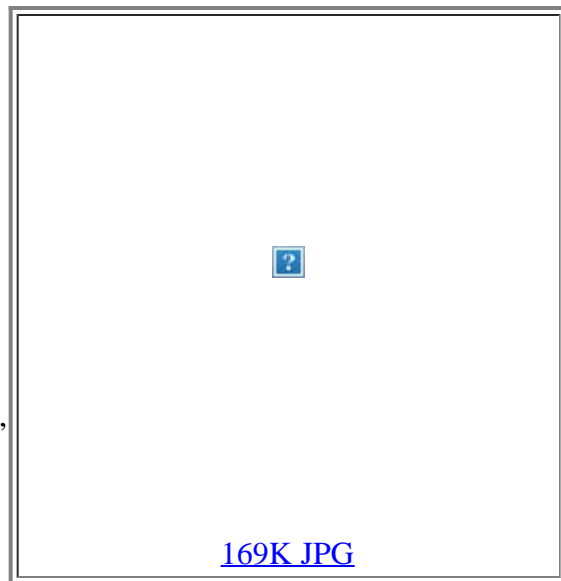
The last thing I do is paint the pupil. Be careful how you do this. Look at the figure and try to see where it's looking. Once you know, paint one eye. Look again. Where's the painted eye looking? There's nothing worse than a cross-eyed mage, so paint the second eye to match the first.

Protecting

You're done. Your figure is finished and the paint is dry. What's next? Protect it! Fingers have acids and oils all over them (and greasy chip and cookie fingers have even more). I always avoid touching a finished figure by anything other than the base, but if you plan on using the figures to game, that won't be enough.

There are finishes and sealants that you can spray or paint on that will seal and protect your figures. They come in flat and various levels of gloss. Beware of how the different finishes will look on your figure. To me, when used exclusively, gloss finishes make a figure look like it was painted with nail polish, while a flat finish can dull down an area you intentionally painted to be shiny. I like to use flat finishes on most (if not all) of a figure, with gloss finish on small areas like crystal balls other things that should be shiny.

To apply, get a brush (for liquid finish) or spray can and cover the completed figure evenly with your choice of finish.



A Few Closing Comments

Well, that's the gist of it. It may seem overwhelming, but it's not. With each new figure you paint, you'll get better and, eventually, you'll have a whole list of tricks of your own. Good luck.

Oh, and by the way, if you discover any neat tricks, [let me know](#). I'm always looking for something to add to my own bag.



by **Hans-Christian Vortisch**

"Secret Weapon. A weapon closely guarded or kept under concealment so as to be used with advantage before countermeasures can be taken against it."

--Dictionary of Weapons and Military Terms

This article deals with weapons used in covert operations, either by secret agents or special operation troops. It is thus intended as direct support for *GURPS Espionage* and *Special Ops*. Both concentrate only on modern day guns, and had to neglect older and the more bizarre designs out there because of space constraints. Some designs will also be useful in *GURPS Cliffhangers* campaigns, or certain historical adventures set in the 20th century.

"Secret agents operating inside enemy territory may carry concealed weapons, mainly for use as a last resort to avoid capture . . . special forces have to carry out such a wide variety of missions that they have a great need for specialised weapons."

--The Visual Dictionary of Special Military Forces

Below the reader will find a mixture of types suitable for covert operations. Most were not necessarily secret in the strictest sense of the term, nor easily hideable, but all were used or intended to be used in secret operations with either secret agents, counter-intelligence agents, or SpecOps soldiers. There are guns literally hand-built for special missions along with some which were made by the million. Some were built into everyday objects, some were easily concealable under clothing, some were vehicle-mounted. Some were used by lonely assassins. Some were used by entire battalions in daring commando raids. And some were probably never used in action at all.

Special Weapons

Aste Stockflinte, 9x10mmR Flobert, Germany, 1910 (Holdout -4)

A smoothbore singleshot weapon concealed as a walking cane. Weapons like this were very popular with civilians in the late 19th century and made in many countries. This one was made in Germany before WWI, where guns like this were often outlawed in certain cities and counties, and forbidden nationwide after 1928. It fired a weak rimfire round. A 9x30mmR smallshot shell could be loaded instead; Dam 1d+1*, Acc 1, 1/2D 3, 1/4D 6, Max 20.

SS-Waffenakademie Koppelschlosspistole, 7.65x17mmSR Browning (.32 ACP), Germany, 1944 (Holdout +6)

The bizarre Koppelschlosspistole (belt buckle pistol) was developed by the SS-Waffenakademie at Brünn (Brno). A special belt buckle was fitted with a springloaded cover. When activated (e.g. by pressing a catch on the buckle or by pulling a string when the wearer was ordered "hands up!"), the cover would open up, revealing four barrels loaded with 7.65mm cartridges. These immediately fired. The belt was intended to be issued to agents as a last-ditch self-defense weapon to avoid capture. The full snap shot penalty always applies, and hits will usually be to Hit Locations 10 or 11. Only a handful were manufactured, and they were probably never used in combat.

SOE Sleeve Pistol Mk I, 7.65x17mmSR Browning (.32 ACP), UK, 1944 (Holdout +1)

This was a slender tube holding a firing chamber and an integral sound suppressor (Hearing -6). It could be carried concealed up one's sleeve. Just before firing it had to be slipped into the hand and could then be fired by pointing the arm at the target. To reload, the cap at the end had to be unscrewed and the spent case removed (about 10 seconds). This was a pure assassination weapon designed by the British Special Operations Executive (SOE).

U.S. Naval Gun Factory Glove Pistol MK1, 9x20mmR (.38 S&W), USA, 1944 (Holdout +3)

Developed by U.S. Naval Intelligence, this weapon consisted of a heavy leather glove with a small metal plate riveted to the back of the hand. This mounted a very short barrel loaded with a single round and a striker assembly, which protruded slightly when the hand was balled into a fist. The weapon was to be used in hand-to-hand combat. The user was to strike the target with his fist, thus firing the bullet point-blank into whatever body part he had hit. Of course, the Glove Pistol's use was highly questionable, and it is unlikely that it was ever used in action.

Llama Pressin, 7.65x17mmSR Browning (.32 ACP), Spain, 1982 (Holdout +2)

This unique weapon was nothing more than two very short barrels side-by-side in a rectangular block, triggered from a button trigger. It came in a cheap-looking plastic case, from which it could be fired without removing the case. The 4.8"x1"x2" case was a non-descript thing of the type used for sun glasses. The double-barreled weapon was developed to discreetly arm a bodyguard. Reloading was not an option in a fire fight.

Pistols

Czeská Zbrojovka vz.27, 7.65x17mmSR Browning (.32 ACP), Czechoslovakia, 1927 (Holdout -0) Secret Weapons in GURPS

A small blowback pistol, adopted by the Czechoslovakian police. Production continued after the German occupation, and the weapon was issued to the German police and Waffen-SS as the P27(t). From about 1943, small numbers were made with slightly longer barrels and screw-on sound suppressors, and these were used by German Abwehr agents, Brandenburg commandos and SS-assassins; Dam 2d-2-, Hearing -5. The SS-Waffenakademie produced and supplied the 7.65x17mmSR K-Patrone, which held a small amount of Aconitine poison (2d damage, see p. CII146 under "Wolfsbane"). In turn, captured weapons were used by the British Special Air Service (SAS).



Production of the vz.27 was resumed after WWII and continued until 1951. Surplus weapons were later delivered to struggling communist countries such as Ethiopia and North Vietnam. In the 1950s it was adopted by the West German foreign intelligence service, the Bundesnachrichtendienst (BND).

Walther P38, 9x19mm Parabellum, Germany, 1939 (Holdout -1)

The P38 superseded the 9x19mm Luger P08 as the standard service pistol of the German military and was consequently made in huge numbers, also by Mauser and Spreewerke. It was the first high-power pistol to use a double-action system. Its commercial counterpart, the Heerespistole (HP), was made between 1938-1945, while the P38 was kept in production until 1946 under French occupation. In the immediate years after the war, it was used by French, Israeli, Norwegian and East German forces.

The P38SD, a modified version, was available with a barrel prepared for the attachment of a sound suppressor, but in much smaller numbers and for special units only. This was commonly used with a special subsonic round, the 9x19mm Nahpatrone with reduced charge; Dam 2d-1, Hearing -5. The P38SD was a standard CIA weapon in the 1950s and 1960s, and also used by the West German Fernspäher (long-range reconnaissance patrol) units.

During the 1940s and again between 1975-1981 the P38K was made. It differed in a shortened barrel; Dam 2d+1, Wt 2.3, Holdout 0. The P38K was used by SpecOps units during WWII, and in post-war years by both the East German Stasi and shortly by the West German GSG9 antiterrorist unit.

In 1957 an improved P38-model with a lightened aluminum frame (Wt 2.1) was adopted as the P1 by the newly formed West German military and was also available commercially, foreign users including Austria, Chile, Pakistan and Uruguay. Although slowly superseded in German service by the 9x19mm H&K P8 since 1994, it is still in production for the civilian market.

High Standard HDMS, 5.6x16mmR (.22 Long Rifle), USA, 1944 (Holdout -2)

The commercial High Standard HD pistol was modified into the HDMS, a silenced weapon with integral sound suppressor for the agents of the American Office of Strategic Services (OSS); about 2,000 were made. It was usually loaded with hollow-points.

Pistols in this caliber have always been popular with professionals. They are light, accurate and easily silenced. For example, Israeli Mossad assassins have long used the Beretta Mod 70 in this way.

KGB Troika, 7.65x17mm, USSR, 1950 (Holdout +2)

The Troika (the name given to it by Western intelligence agencies) was a typical spy weapon designed for assassination at close range. It was a small hide-away gun chambered for a unique electrically primed 7.65mm cartridge. In place of a magazine it had a replaceable barrel cluster which was inserted into the weapon from above. The cluster consisted of three preloaded over-and-under barrels with integral sound suppressors (Hearing -6). After all three barrels had been fired the cluster had to be replaced. Three different types of projectiles were available, a normal bullet, a hollow-point bullet (p. HT7) and a poison projectile containing cyanide (the poison does 4d of damage, causing cardiac arrest; see p. CII141). The pistol fired electrically; a commercial 9V battery went into the grip. The slimline frame allowed it to be easily hidden. All Troikas were hand-made in small numbers in the workshops of the KGB.

Apparently, it was copied as an unreloadable plastic throw-away weapon by Arab terrorists during the 1970s for use in airplane hijackings. This version was undetectable by metal detectors when the battery was removed. It was not suppressed.

Heckler & Koch P9S, 9x19mm Parabellum, West Germany, 1970 (Holdout -1)

A double-action pistol using the same roller-locking action as most longarms made by H&K. It was adopted by the GSG9 antiterrorist unit, but in their service replaced by the 9x19mm H&K P7 in 1980. Other SpecOps users have included the Dutch SBS naval commandos, the Greek MYK naval commandos, and the Portuguese and Spanish police GEO antiterrorist units. The P9S was also widely sold commercially, in both combat and sports versions, the latter with match grip, muzzle weight and accurized sights; Acc 5, Wt 2.8. EBO of Greece made it under license.

A number of sound-suppressed versions were made to special order beginning in 1973, including some made for a Swiss agency and a larger batch for the U.S. Navy SEALs, replacing the obsolete 9x19mm S&W MK22-0 Hush Puppy; Wt 3.2 with the suppressor attached. The SEALs used it throughout the 1980s and apparently right until 1996, when it was officially superseded by the 11.43x23mm (.45 ACP) H&K MK23-0.

From 1976 the basic P9S was also made in 11.43x23mm for the American market; Dam 2d+, Wt 2.2, AWt 0.5, Shots 7+1, ST 11, Rcl -2. A much smaller number was made in 7.65x21mm Parabellum for the Italian market; Dam 2d-, Shots 8+1.

Tzniitochmash MPS, 7.62x35mm, USSR, 1972 (Holdout +2)

This was another purpose-built assassination weapon. It was a double-barreled derringer-type weapon, which was loaded with two-round clips. The cartridges were of the silent "piston" type (Hearing -6). They didn't require a sound suppressor, as the powder gases were contained within the sealed cartridge case. A bullet fired from this pistol would look exactly as if fired from a 7.62x39mm AK-47 assault rifle, down to the rifling marks, and might thus suggest to the authorities that the shot was fired from a much greater distance. The weapon was used both in Afghanistan and Central America by Soviet KGB agents and SpecOps units such as the Spetsnaz.

Shotguns

Remington MOD 7188 MK1, 18.5x70mmR (12-gauge), USA, 1968 (Holdout -6)

This was a full-automatic conversion of the Remington Model 1100 semi-automatic shotgun. It was developed for the U.S. Navy SEALs, and very small numbers were used in operations during the Vietnam War. It was fitted with rifle sights and a bayonet lug for the M7 knife/bayonet of the M16.

Submachine Guns

Steyr M.12/P16, 9x23mm Steyr, Austria, 1916 (Holdout -2)

This machine pistol was a variant of the Austrian service pistol M.12, designed for Austrian mountain troops fighting the Italians in the Dolomites during WWI. It featured a fixed, elongated 16-round magazine, which was loaded with 8-round stripper clips. A wooden shoulderstock was sometimes attached (+3 Acc, using Light Auto skill). Some 9,900 were supplied before production ceased in 1918.

In 1940, a number of surviving guns was re-barreled to fire the 9x19mm Parabellum round and issued to the German SpecOps commandos of the Brandenburg regiment. These could also be fitted with a sound suppressor.

Marlin UD42, 9x19mm Parabellum, USA, 1942 (Holdout -5)

This submachine gun was made by Marlin Firearms for the United Defense Supply Corporation, which was a cover organization set up by the OSS. The UD42 was of high quality, and externally resembled the Auto-Ordnance M1921 Tommy Gun. It had a wooden foregrip. The weapon fired from a closed bolt in single shot mode (Acc 8) and from an open bolt on full auto (Acc 6). The double magazine consisted of two separate magazines taking 20 rounds each, mated at the back. After 20 rounds had been expended, it had to be removed, turned over and re-inserted (requiring 2 seconds). About 15,000 of these guns were made. Most were taken by the OSS, and either issued to agents inserted into occupied areas or dropped by parachute for use by resistance fighters. Some 2,000 were thus delivered to the French resistance.

BSA STEN Mk IIS, 9x19mm Parabellum, UK, 1943 (Holdout -5)

This was a variant of the STEN Mk II (p. HT116) with an integral full-length sound suppressor. The suppressor was very effective (Hearing -6), but wore out after 30 or sometimes as little as 15 rounds. Burst-fire was strongly discouraged, the idea being to fire carefully aimed single shots to make it last longer. The magazine was badly designed, and the manufacturer advised to load it with only 28 rounds for more reliable feeding! The STEN Mk IIS was the most numerous sound-suppressed weapon of WWII. It was widely used by British and some Allied commando units, and many were also supplied to resistance groups in Western Europe, especially Denmark and France. Specimens captured by the Germans were used by their own SpecOps assets as the MP751(e).

Beretta Mod 12, 9x19mm Parabellum, Italy, 1959 (Holdout -4 with stock folded)

This blowback weapon used to be the standard Italian submachine gun. It had an integral foregrip and a folding wire stock. It was offered with magazines holding 20 (AWt 0.95), 30 or 40 (AWt 1.6) rounds. In 1961 it was adopted by the Italian armed forces and police as the PM-12 (including the GIS antiterror unit), and also delivered to a number of foreign nations, among them Chad, France, Guatemala, Iran, Libya, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, and Venezuela. The U.S. Navy SEALs acquired 200 in the 1970s, while the State Department bought large numbers for U.S. embassy guards in foreign countries. It was license-made by FN of Belgium, Taurus of Brazil, Bandung Arsenal of Indonesia, and Kaduna Arsenal of Nigeria. The Mod 12 was a favorite weapon of the terrorist Illich Ramirez Sanchez ("Carlos the Jackal"), and apparently also used by German RAF terrorists. In 1978 it was superseded in production by the slightly improved Mod 12S. For illustration, see p. SO2.

Heckler & Koch MP5K, 9x19mm Parabellum, West Germany, 1976 (Holdout -3)

The Maschinenpistole 5 Kurz was a chopped-down variant of the MP5 submachine gun (pp. HT116, SO105-106) without stock. It was normally used with the standard 30-round magazine, but a shorter 15-round magazine (AWt 0.7) was available. The gun was so small that it could be conveniently carried in a special shoulder holster. The MP5K was

designed for bodyguards and SpecOps forces, and widely adopted by Western units of this type, including the German GSG9 and KSK, the U.S. Army 1st SFOD Delta, the helicopter pilots of the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment, the pilots of the USAF 16th Special Operations Wing, the U.S. Navy SEALs, the French GIGN, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, the Australian and British SAS, the Irish Rangers, the Kuwaiti and Jordanian Special Forces, the Indian presidential guards, etc. Through hidden channels it was also acquired by the former East German Staatssicherheitsdienst (Stasi), the secret police and intelligence service, and apparently used as a standard weapon with in-country hit teams. It is safe to assume that the Soviets also acquired some. The gun has been made under license in England, Iran, and Turkey.

The MP5KA1 had the sights removed (+1 Fast-Draw), and with a 15-round magazine had these stats: Acc 3, Wt 5.0, Holdout -2.

The MP5KA4 available since 1982 had a 3-round burst option added, while the MP5KA5 was similar to the MP5KA1, also offering 3-round bursts.

In 1991, the MP5K-PDW was introduced, basically an MP5K with folding stock and a barrel prepared for a sound suppressor; Acc 7, Wt 7.3, Holdout -3 with stock folded. This was designed as an aircrew survival and self-defense weapon, and usually issued with a detachable sound suppressor (+1.25 lbs., Hearing -5). A special hardshell briefcase was offered by H&K, which held any one of the above models in a quick-detach mount. A trigger and a safety were incorporated in the carrying handle, so that the gun could be remote-fired through a hidden port from within, the spent cases being collected inside. The non-descript briefcase weighed 14.85 lbs. including the loaded gun and a spare 30-round magazine, and cost \$1,600. When firing from the case, the full snap shot penalty is always applied.

Similar cased assemblies have been made in Czechoslovakia (suppressed 7.65x17mmSR CZ vz.61 Skorpion), Israel (9x19mm IMI Mini-Uzi) and in the USA (short-barreled 5.6x16mmR American 180).

Rifles

Cranston-Johnson M1941, 7.62x63mm (.30-06 Springfield), USA, 1941 (Holdout -6)

This was a self-loading rifle developed in the late 1930s in an unsuccessful bid to replace Garand's M1. It had an internal 10-round magazine loaded with 5-round clips or single cartridges. Some 2,000 made by Cranston Arms were taken by the U.S. Marines in 1942, and used in the Pacific Theater until sufficient M1 rifles became available. Service was restricted to Marine Parachutists and the Marine Raiders. In about 1944 these were returned to the USA and given to the OSS, which dropped many by parachute over Europe to resistance fighters, mostly in France. The U.S. Army Rangers also got some, many of a 50,000 contract originally for the Dutch colonial troops in the East Indies, which could not all be delivered. Many of those wound up with the Brazilian forces in Europe.

One thousand were made in 7x57mm Mauser for Chile (Dam 6d+2) before production ceased in 1944.

Rheinmetall FG42/II, 7.92x57mm Mauser, Germany, 1943 (Holdout -6)

The German Fallschirmjäger (parachutists) were under the control of the Luftwaffe (air force), and used some weapons differing from normal Heer (army) units. The Fallschirmjärgewehr 42 was developed by Rheinmetall to a Luftwaffe requirement for a combined rifle and light machine gun. It was a very unique design of bullpup configuration, with the magazine feeding from the left side above the pistol grip. The gun had several good design features such as a straight-line stock with recoil-reducing spring and a muzzlebrake compensator, but operationally it was a failure in the end because of the insistence of using the full-power rifle round. It fired from a closed bolt in single shot mode (Acc 10) and from the open bolt position on full auto (Acc 8). Features also included an integral folding bipod and a spike bayonet which swiveled backwards when not in use. The pre-series FG42/I was ready in 1942.

The FG42/II entered limited production the next year and was first used in May 1943 in a SpecOps operation on the Greek isles and also in the famous operation "Eiche," the daring raid to free Mussolini on September 12, 1943 in Italy. Two Fallschirmjäger per 9-man squad carried the FG42/II in place of the standard 9x19mm ERMA MP40 submachine gun.

The main production weapon, the improved FG42/III made by Krieghoff, was not delivered until 1944. It differed from the earlier types in a number of ways; Wt 12.6, RoF 10*, Rcl -2.

The FG42 was often fitted with a 4x scope (+2 Acc). Only about 7,000 of all types were made for the Luftwaffe. Late in the war, a separate batch of some 4,100 was made for the Heer.

Remington M1903A4, 7.62x63mm (.30-06 Springfield), USA, 1943 (Holdout -6)

A dedicated sniper version of the Springfield M1903A3 bolt-action service rifle (see p. HT114). It featured a 2.5x Weaver scope and was loaded with 5-round stripper clips or single cartridges. During WWII, each Ranger platoon had one sniper with this rifle. It was also used in the initial stages of the Vietnam War.

The Remington M1942 adopted by the USMC was a similar weapon. It was based on the Springfield M1903A1 and was fitted with a 8x Unertl scope (+3 Acc). It was used until the 1960s.

Haenel StG44, 7.92x33mm Kurz, Germany, 1944 (Holdout -6)

The Sturmgewehr 44 was the first assault rifle in both name and shape and function, the direct forefather of Kalashnikov's AK-47. It fired an intermediate power round and used a curved large-capacity magazine. It evolved via the MKb42, MP43 and MP44, which were all basically the same gun with almost identical statistics. A few thousand of the MKb42 were made and successfully tested at the front in 1942, whereupon the MP43 was put into full production. Minor production changes led to the MP44, which was re-designated the StG44 in December 1944. More than 430,000 were made by Haenel, ERMA, Mauser, Sauer, Steyr and Walther, and it was intended to replace all rifles and submachine guns in German service; it was also installed as bow-machine gun in the experimental Panther II tank.

As to clandestine use, about 300 were fitted in late 1944 with the top secret Leitz ZG1223 Vampir active IR-sighting system. This consisted of an IR-spotlight and IR-scope mounted on the gun (5.1 lbs.), and a heavy battery assembly carried in a rucksack (29.9 lbs.). It could be used to a range of some 75 yards and negated all darkness penalties.

The weapon continued to surface for many decades after WWII in smaller conflicts in Africa, the Middle East and Southeast Asia, usually delivered to Communist forces by sympathetic nations such as Czechoslovakia and East Germany. Thus it was encountered by the Americans in Vietnam and the Israelis in Lebanon.

Izhmash AKS-74UB, 5.45x39mm, USSR, 1979 (Holdout -5 with stock folded)

This was a SpecOps version of the AKS-74U assault carbine (p. SO100 under "AK-74"). The flashhider of the standard issue weapon was replaced by a detachable PBS-2 sound suppressor (Hearing -5). Typically used with special subsonic ammunition, it could also fire standard rounds, although with less good results (Dam 3d, Hearing -3). It had a folding stock and could use all magazines of the AK-74-series, including a short 20-round magazine (AWt 0.9) and the 45-round magazine (AWt 1.65) and 90-round drum (AWt 4.55) of the RPK-74 light machine gun. The gun was adopted by SpecOps units of all Soviet armed forces, including those of the Ministry of the Interior. It continues to be used in Russia.

The AKS-74UB could mount the 30mm BS-1 underbarrel grenade launcher (see below).

Walther WA2000, 7.62x66mmB (.300 Winchester Magnum), West Germany, 1982 (Holdout -7)

The Walther Automat 2000 was supposedly one of the most accurate sniper rifles ever designed. It was a bullpup weapon literally built around an extremely heavy, free-floating barrel. It had a fully adjustable wooden stock with thumbhole grip, a folding bipod and a variable power scope (2.5-10x). The WA2000 fired semi-automatic. It was only made to order and each was adjusted to the individual customer (one of them being James Bond in *The Living Daylights*). It could be set up for left-hand firers.

Alternatively, it could be ordered in 7.62x51mm NATO or 7.5x55mm Swiss (both Dam 7d).

Although offered until 1988, production already ceased in 1984, a mere 72 having been sold. A handful were acquired by the German state police of Baden-Württemberg, both in 7.62x51mm and 7.62x66mmB, and used by SWAT officers. The price listed is for a used gun in perfect condition.

Machine Guns

Vickers G.O. Mk I, 7.7x56mmR (.303 SAA), UK, 1937

This gas-operated machine gun (commercial designation Mark K) was based on the Vickers-Berthier Mk I light machine gun of the Indian Army. It was adopted by the Royal Air Force to replace the 7.7x56mmR BSA-Lewis Mk III as a defensive gun on airplanes such as the Fairey Swordfish naval scout or the Vickers Wellesley bomber. Like the Lewis, it fed from a large platter drum magazine on top of the receiver. The gun was soon obsolete as an aircraft weapon, surplus weapons being used from about 1942 onwards by British elite raiding and reconnaissance units such as the Long Range Desert Group and SAS as vehicle armament, especially for use against aircraft. A typical Willy's jeep of the SAS in North Africa and later France was fitted with twin guns on a pintle mount at the co-drivers seat, and another pair of linked guns behind the drivers seat, covering the rear when the vehicle was standing still. It was still in service in 1956, when the Willy's jeeps airdropped together with the British Paras over Egypt during the Suez crisis were armed with twin guns at the co-driver's seats.

The Mark K was also delivered to Poland and Spain, while Argentina bought some in 7.65x53mm Mauser (Dam 6d+2) and Turkey in 7.92x57mm Mauser (Dam 7d+1). These were all used on aircraft.

Cadillac Gage-Stoner MK23 MOD 0 Commando, 5.56x45mm (.223 Remington), USA, 1969 (Holdout -7)

In 1962, Eugene Stoner, father of the AR-15 family, started to design a modular firearm system which allowed assembly of a rifle, a carbine, and several machine guns from a common set of parts. The Model 63 system was tested by the USMC, but rejected.

The slightly improved Model 63A entered production in 1966 and was immediately seized upon by the U.S. Navy SEALs. A belt-fed light machine gun version of the Model 63A was extensively used in Vietnam by the SEALs (and only them) beginning in 1967. This weapon fed from a disintegrating belt, which was usually transported in a 100-round plastic container clipped below the receiver; Dam 5d, 1/2D 500, Max 3,500, Wt 15.2, AWt 3.3, Shots 100.

A further improved version was the Model 63A1. It was officially adopted by the SEALs as the MK23-0 Commando, the only Stoner machine gun to be so. The MK23-0 had a shortened, fluted barrel and lacked both the bipod and carrying handle of the earlier guns. It introduced an aluminum drum container which held a 150-round belt. Only 800 of the Model 63A and 63A1 guns were made.

Santa Bárbara-CETME AMELI, 5.56x45mm NATO, Spain, 1982 (Holdout -6)

The Ametralladora Ligera was one of the lightest weapons of its class. It resembled a smaller version of the German 7.92x57mm Rheinmetall MG42, a 7.62x51mm NATO variant of which was made in Spain as the MG3S. The AMELI was a belt-fed weapon using either 100-round or 200-round (AWt 6.6) disintegrating belts, which came in plastic assault packs attached under the weapon. The cyclic rate of fire could be changed by installing either one of two bolt carriers available. The AMELI was adopted by the Spanish Army and Mexican Marines. One interesting feature was that it disassembled very easily and would then fit into a small briefcase, together with a 100-round box. A trained operator could assemble the gun from the briefcase in 20 seconds (an Armoury (Small Arms) or Guns (Light Auto) roll is required).

Since the late 1980s, a lightweight version was available; Wt 14.8 with 100-round belt.

Grenade Launchers

Izhmash BS-1, 30mm, USSR, 1986

This was a unique underbarrel grenade launcher only seen mounted under the AKS-74UB suppressed assault carbine (see above). It silently launched a 30mm HEAT grenade by means of a piston, which was activated by a 9x18mm blank cartridge. Flash and sound were contained within the weapon, helping to conceal the grenadier's position. The grenade was muzzle-loaded, while the blank cartridges were fed by means of a bolt-action system from a curved 10-round magazine in the launcher's pistol grip. The whole assembly weighed 3.3 lbs.

Hand Grenades

NWM V40, The Netherlands, 1968 (Holdout +3)

The V40 minigrenade was the smallest hand grenade ever produced in quantity. Its body was spherical and only 1.5" across (about the size of a golf ball), with a filler of 1.1 oz. of RDX. The fuse detonated it after 4 seconds. It came in bandoleers of five (1.4 lbs.). The V40 was combat-trialed in 1969 in Vietnam by the U.S. Navy SEALs and U.S. Army Special Forces, but not adopted. It was copied in China and North Korea.

Selected References

Dockery, Kevin (1991). *Compendium of Modern Firearms*. R. Talsorian Games, Berkeley.

Only some of the listed weapons are described here, but the book is too good to miss.

Gander, Terry, ed. (2000). *Jane's Infantry Weapons 2000-2001*. Jane's Information Services, London.

The most valuable single-volume resource in the field of modern firearms. For purposes of this article, older issues of this since 1975 annually published book are actually more useful.

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). *The Greenhill Military Small Arms Data Book*. Greenhill/Stackpole, London/Mechanicsburg.

Excellent source for technical data, manufacturers etc. 295 pages and worth every penny. Almost no pictures, you need at least another book to visualize what Hogg is talking about.

Smith, Walther/Smith, Joseph (1973). *Small Arms of the World*. Stackpole, Harrisburg.

Another excellent book, available in a number of different editions. If you get only one book on guns, get this.

Tucker, Louise, ed. (1993). *The Visual Dictionary of Special Military Forces*. Eyewitness Visual Dictionaries. Dorling Kindersley, London/New York/Stuttgart.

No stats, no explanations and weak on dates, it is nevertheless worthwhile for its very good illustrations, not restricted to guns either. Actually includes much secret agent equipment as well.

Notes

Wt: Loaded weight of the gun, in pounds.

AWt: The weight of the standard ammunition container or a number of loose rounds. Optional magazines are listed in the descriptions.

Cost: Cost with one empty magazine, unloaded, including any sighting devices as per description.

Special Weapons

Weapon	Mal	Type	Damage	SS	Acc	1/2D	Max	Wt	AWt	RoF	Shots	Cost	ST	Rcl	TL
Aste Stockflinte, 9x10mmR, Guns (Spec)	crit	Cr	1d	10	4	25	150	2.0	0.01	1/6	1	\$10/-	8	-1	5
Koppelschlosspistole, 7.65x17mmSR, Guns (Spec)	16	Cr	2d-1-	10	0	10	500	1.0	0.04	4	4	n/a	8	-2	6
Sleeve Pistol Mk I, 7.65x17mmSR, Guns (Spec)	crit	Cr	2d-1-	8	0	50	500	1.5	0.01	1/10	1	n/a	8	-2	6
Glove Pistol MK1, 9x20mmR, Brawling	16	Cr	2d	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	0.5	0.03	1/6	1	n/a	8	-1	6
Llama Pressin, 7.65x17mmSR, Guns (Spec)	crit	Cr	2d-1-	10	0	100	1,500	0.8	0.02	2~	2	\$100/-	8	-2	7

Pistols

CZ vz.27, 7.65x17mmSR, Guns (Ptl)	crit	Cr	2d-1-	10	2	100	1,500	1.8	0.25	3~	8+1	\$50/-	8	-1	6
Walther P38, 9x19mm, Guns (Ptl)	crit	Cr	2d+2	10	3	150	1,800	2.4	0.4	3~	8+1	\$75/1,000	9	-1	6
High Standard HDMS, 5.6x16mmR Guns (Ptl)	crit	Cr	1d-	10	3	50	600	2.5	0.4	3~	10+1	\$75/-	7	-1	6

KGB Troika, 7.65x17mm, Guns (Ptl)	crit	Cr	1d-	10	0	10	150	1.3	0.25	3~	3	n/a	8	-1	7
H&K P9S, 9x19mm, Guns (Ptl)	crit	Cr	2d+2	10	4	150	1,800	2.3	0.4	3~	9+1	\$500/-	9	-1	7
Tzniitochmash MPS, 7.62x35mm, Guns (Ptl)	crit	Cr	1d+2	10	1	50	500	1.3	0.05	2~	2	n/a	9	-1	7

Shotguns

Remington MOD7188 MK1, 18.5x70mmR, Guns (LtAu)	crit	Cr	4d*	12	5	25	150	9.6	1.1	7*	7+1	\$1000/-	12	-2	7
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Submachine Guns

Steyr M.12/P16, 9x23mm, Guns (MP)	crit	Cr	2d+2	10	3	150	1,800	2.8	0.4	13*	16	\$50/-	10	-3	6
Marlin UD42, 9x19mm, Guns (LtAu)	crit	Cr	3d-1	10	6/8	160	1,900	11.1	2.0	11*	2x20	\$200/-	10	-1	6
BSA STEN Mk IIS, 9x19mm, Guns (Rfl)	crit	Cr	2d-1	10	6	100	1,000	9.0	1.4	7*	32	\$25/-	10	-1	6
Beretta Mod 12, 9x19mm, Guns (LtAu)	crit	Cr	3d-1	10	6	160	1,900	8.5	1.3	9*	30	\$500/-	10	-1	7
H&K MP5K, 9x19mm, Guns (MP)	crit	Cr	2d+2	10	4	150	1,800	5.6	1.2	15*	30+1	\$900/1,500	10	-2	7

Rifles

Johnson M1941, 7.62x63mm, Guns (Rfl)	crit	Cr	7d+1	14	10	1,000	4,650	10.2	0.6	3~	10	\$80/-	11	-2	6
Rheinmetall FG42/II, 7.92x57mm, Guns (LtAu)	crit	Cr	6d+1	14	8/10	800	3,900	12.4	1.8	15*	20	\$100/-	11	-3	6
Remington M1903A4, 7.62x63mm, Guns (Rfl)	crit	Cr	7d+1	15	10+1	1,000	4,650	10.2	0.6	1/2	5+1	\$120/-	11	-2	6
Haenel StG44, 7.92x33mm, Guns (LtAu)	crit	Cr	5d	12	8	500	3,100	13.2	2.0	8*	30	\$70/-	10	-2	6
Izhmash AKS-74UB, 5.45x39mm, Guns (LtAu)	crit	Cr	2d	10	6	200	1,500	9.2	1.2	10*	30	\$500/750	10	-1	7
Walther WA2000, 7.62x66mmB, Guns (Rfl)	ver	Cr	8d+1	14	13+3	1,300	5,000	17.4	0.9	3~	6+1	\$12,500	12B	-2	7

Machine Guns

Vickers G.O. Mk I, 7.7x56mmR, Gunner (MG)	crit	Cr	6d+2	18	8	600	3,800	25.0	4.0	20	96	\$350/-	n/a	-1	6
Stoner MK23-0, 5.56x45mm, Guns (LtAu)	crit	Cr	5d-1	14	8	500	3,000	14.2	4.3	14	150	\$3,000/-	10	-1	7
CETME AMELI, 5.56x45mm, Guns (LtAu)	crit	Cr	5d	14	8	800	3,500	17.4	3.4	15/20	100	\$2,500	10B	-1	7

Grenade Launchers

Izhmash BS-1, 30mm HEAT, Guns (GL)	crit	Exp	5dx2(10)	14	4	100	350	+3.3	0.5	1/5	1	\$600/-	11	-1	7
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Hand Grenades

NMW V40, Throwing	crit	Exp	1d [2d]	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	0.3	n/a	n/a	n/a	\$5	-	n/a	7
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Beneath the Sphinx

by A. L. Maturin

Ingredients

Introduction

Since the beginning of recorded history humanity has tried to unravel the mysteries of the Sphinx. How was it built? Who built it? When was it built? These questions, and many others, along with the sheer majesty of the Sphinx have caused many men (and women) to devote their lives to answering the riddle. Even now, millennia later, the Sphinx still baffles Egyptologists and continues to reveal its secrets. In the 1990s, due to the work of archaeologists using ground-penetrating radar (GPR), what is believed to be a chamber has been discovered beneath the Sphinx. The Egyptian government refuses to allow a dig to open the chamber, so one can only guess at what wonders lay inside . . .

The False Chamber

This is the chamber that the GPR revealed. It is located between the Sphinx's two paws, just before the body. The earth here is very hard, yet sandy, clay. Once dug, a descending stairway leading to the entrance is revealed. The stairs are huge slabs of limestone quarried from nearby. The entrance is an unmarked, granite frame with a large limestone slab blocking the doorway. There are no inscriptions on the frame, which strikes any archaeologist as very peculiar. Once the stone slab is removed, a 10' x 20' chamber, devoid of the usual hieroglyphs and artifacts accompanying tombs, is revealed. There is a limestone sarcophagus lying at the far end of the room. It too is devoid of inscription. The sarcophagus is empty; however, there is a false bottom, which leads to another descending stairway. The stairway ends abruptly at a 10' x 10' square pit that is 20' deep. The walls of the pit are utterly smooth so it would be impossible to climb without help from others or modern rock climbing equipment. On the other side of the pit are two corridors, each leading in opposite directions and each leading to an adjoining chamber.

The Adjoining Chambers

Each of the adjoining chambers contains enough Egyptian artifacts to make this dig the most valuable in history. The items range from golden scroll containers (each containing scrolls originally housed in the Library at Alexandria . . . with the seal to prove it.), gold dining ware, mummified cats and dogs (in jewel encrusted, golden sarcophagi), and chests of gold and gems; each chamber also contains four full sets of Egyptian-made armor. All of this, of course, is a distraction to keep tomb robbers from the real prize, which lies in the inner chamber.

Each chamber contains a corner floor stone, which can be lifted, revealing another descending stairway. These stairwells are very small and steep, and descend about 40'. There is a chance of someone falling and severely injuring himself due to the nature of the stairways. Both sets of stairs lead to opposite ends of the inner chamber.

The Inner Chamber

The inner chamber is a 10' x 10' room centered between the adjoining chambers, some 40' below. There is a pedestal, carved of solid obsidian, in the center of the room. Hieroglyphic inscriptions on the walls warn of the destructive power of the item that sits on the pedestal. Anyone removing the item from the pedestal will receive three poison darts (coming from the pedestal itself), though the poison itself will do no damage -- it's been harmless for millennia -- it will still make its victim feel somewhat nauseated. Anyone else in the room may have a chance of getting hit with the darts, as three fly from each of the pedestal's cardinal directions.

There are several different types of statuettes lining the walls of the chamber. They range from 6" to 1' in height. They

are recognizable to any Egyptologist as warrior guardians that protect a Pharaoh's soul on the trip to the land of the dead. It is strange, however, because no remains can be found anywhere within the complex.

Cooking Tips

The Glory of Egypt

The item on the pedestal is an ancient time-traveling device. When activated the device will automatically send the occupants of the room back to the time when the priests buried the device. The priests, of course, knew this would happen and have prepared for it. Several guards and priests will meet the time-travelers here and request their aid in stopping the Pharaoh's plot.

The Pharaoh's plan involves building a massive pyramid; five times the size of the Great Pyramid, with an outer covering of gold, which will be inscribed with blasphemous text to incite rage in Ra (king of the gods), in hopes of challenging him for his position. The pyramid is nearing completion, with only the inscriptions left to complete. The priests believe the Pharaoh has gone mad, and believe Ra would destroy all of Egypt rather than accept the challenge. It is up to the time-travelers to stop the construction of the Pyramid, or all of Egypt is doomed.



Extra Spice? What if the item is a one-way device? What if the priests stole the item from an alien race still in Egypt? What if the priests want the time-travelers to kill the Pharaoh? What if the Pharaoh is an alien?

The Glory of the Sphinx

The item on the pedestal is an ancient magical orb, which was used to transform the Sphinx into its current state. When touched the orb will glow and the earth will begin to tremble, as the Sphinx transforms back into its original (living) state. The Sphinx is still angry at being turned to stone and begins his rampage at Giza. Fully healed in the reverse of the transformation, he will attack any humans on sight. The Pyramids are a reminder of those who enslaved him, so he will attempt to destroy them too.

Extra Spice? What if the Sphinx was willingly turned to stone to deliver some message? What if he dies, due to the damage to his body, before he can fully deliver the message? What if the message was the return of the ancient gods? What if those gods are already here?

The Glory of Ashun

Ashun is a god born of Geb (the earth-god) and Nut (goddess of the heavens). Ashun has never been mentioned before in any religious scripts because Shu (air-god, second king of the gods), enraged by the newborn child, enslaved him into a magical orb before anyone learned of his birth. This orb lies upon the pedestal. When activated, the orb will free Ashun, who is all too eager to claim the throne as the king of gods, since all the other gods are gone.

Extra Spice? What if Ashun is angry at humanity also? What if Ashun was trapped in his child-like state? What if Ashun requires a human queen to continue his line? What if the other gods return?

Side Salad

Don't forget about the items in the adjoining chambers. The scrolls could contain any number of things: the real location of Atlantis, encounters with alien races, lost technology, evidence that the Egyptians had some modern technology (like steam engines or electrical power), etc. This would be a good place to plant clues to further adventures. The pedestal could also have some importance to the adventure. It could be the only weapon that could destroy the Sphinx, the Pharaoh, or Ashun, for example.

Professor Pfiffen-Pfeffer (The Big Cheese)

by Rik Kershaw-Moore

Note: The Big Cheese's stats are presented in parentheses.

Beliefs & Goals: Der vorld vould be der better place mit gadgets. Vith mine gadgets I can be makink der world happier. Ah-ah-ah-choo! *(Ah, as you can see I am the consummate villain. I will take over the world, and there is nothing you can do to stop me. Ah-ah-ah-choo!)*

Hit Points: 7 (10)

Muscle: 3

- Break Down Door 3 (5)
- Climb 3 (3)
- Fight 3 (5)
- Pick Up Heavy Things 3 (4)

Zip: 4

- Dodge 4 (6)
- Drive Vehicle 6 (4)
- Fire Gun 4 (6)
- Jump 4 (4)
- Ride 4 (4)
- Run 4 (4)
- Swim 4 (4)



Smarts: 6

- Hide/Spot Hidden 6 (6)
- Identify Dangerous Things 11 (9)
- Read 8 (6)
- Resist Fast Talk 9 (9)
- See/Hear/Smell 8 (6)
- Track/Cover Tracks 6 (6)

Chutzpah: 5

- Fast Talk 5 (8)
- Pass/Detect Shoddy Goods 8 (8)
- Sleight of Hand 7 (6)
- Sneak 5 (5)

Shticks:

Change Shape: 7

Bag of Many Wrong Things: 5 -- This is a like a standard bag of many things except that whatever is pulled out is always totally wrong and useless.

(Change Shape 7, Teleport 6)

Quote: Somereve is der lever zat vill change der vorld, all I am havink to do iz findink it. *(No Mr Stocks, I expect you to cry!)*

Professor Pfiffen-Pfeffer is your classic 4-foot high cartoon duck in a white lab coat; the right pocket of which is a bag of many *wrong* things. He has the usual yellow bill and black feathers except, for a mass of white feathers that

flop uncontrollably across his face. He is also extremely absent-minded, speaks with a heavy Teutonic accent, and works at Anytown University.

The good professor has a serious problem. He is violently allergic to an astonishingly wide variety of substances. In fact, his sneezes are so violent and long drawn out that they catapult him out of shot, and cause him to change into the evil genius known as the Big Cheese.

The Big Cheese is a sinister looking 4-foot high white mouse (also with allergies). This evil genius has waxed and curled whiskers and wears impeccably tailored black suits with matching black gloves. The Big Cheese has one ambition: to rule the World; strangely enough, he tries to achieve this goal by using the good professor's inventions. So far no one has worked out that the Big Cheese and Professor Pfiffen-Pfeffer are one and the same. In fact, neither the Big Cheese or Professor Pfiffen-Pfeffer are aware of this fact.

So what makes these two characters sneeze? Well it can be anything from the mundane (pepper) to the esoteric (Foogle Bird feathers), depending on what the animator feels is appropriate. There is, however, a 50 percent chance that the substance that made the Professor change will not make the Big Cheese sneeze. Also if either the Big Cheese or the Professor are knocked down, then there is a 50 percent chance that when they come round they will flip characters.

Plot Lines

The Amourizer

In a desperate attempt to help reduce the amount of needless violence in Anytown, Professor Pfiffen-Pfeffer came up with the Amourizer, a raygun shaped device that shoots out an incoherent stream of strange attractor particles. The upshot of which is that anyone who gets zapped by the pink mist ray will instantly fall in love with his or her mortal enemies. Cats suddenly love dogs, and mice will treat cats with great affection and so on. In short, total chaos, and guess who has the ray now?

Not only will the Characters have to work out a way of taking the Amourizer off the Big Cheese, but they need to work out how to reverse the effects of the ray.

The Weather Machine

In the last couple of days Anytown's weather has become very erratic, and the populations of "real" penguins and ducks has mushroomed, whilst showers of cows and anvils have risen dramatically.

After a while, when things apparently can't get any stranger it is revealed that the Big Cheese is behind all this high weirdness. He has taken control of the weather using Professor Pfiffen-Pfeffer's weather machine.

The Weather machine is a 30-foot high black cube of metal with a parabolic dish on top. The machine has a control panel with a small screen, a keyboard, a large black lever, a large read lever and a six position selector switch labelled N, R, S, H, C, and U.

To operate the machine you first select a type of weather, then enter the coordinates of where you want the weather to happen and pull the black lever. If you don't enter the coordinates then the weather will happen directly above the machine. When you want the weather to stop simply push the black lever back to its starting point. Oh and whatever you do, don't pull the red lever . . . this makes the machine explode.

The Dial Settings:

N (Nice) A typical nice sunny day.

R (Rain) A small black cloud will move in and block out the sun. Then it starts to rain. Within seconds the characters will find themselves up to their knees in water, and ducks will swim past. If the rain isn't stopped then it will quickly submerge the characters, and shark fins will slice through the water. Switching the machine off will make the water drain away but the ducks will hang around for a while, getting under everyone's feet.

S (Snow) Snow is very similar to rain except that the black cloud dispenses mammoth quantities of snow. The characters will instantly become living snowmen, and penguins and polar bears will turn up to harass them.

H (Hail) The black cloud scuds across the sky, produces a megaphone and screams "Hey Taxi!" Roll on the "Call Me a Taxi" Table for the result.

C (Cows) Mooooooooooooooooooooo . . . thud! Speaks for itself really. Cows start dropping from the sky. By some strange quirk of fate the cows are being deliberately aimed at the characters. The cows probably want to use the characters as a cushion. It will take liberal use of Dodge rolls to avoid being boggled and flattened by incoming cattle. Those who don't get out of the way take 3 dice damage.

U (User-Defined) Anything the animator wants. Anvils are a good all round choice, but if you are fresh out of ideas the feel free to consult the "Things Falling From Sky" Table.

Pyramid Review

Hero Builder's Guidebook (for Dungeons & Dragons)

Published by [Wizards of the Coast](#)



Written by **Ryan Dancey, David Noonan, and John D. Rateliff**

64 ppg.; \$14.95

The *Hero Builder's Guidebook* is a companion to the *3rd Edition D&D Player's Handbook*, and that alone set my teeth a little on edge when I first took a look at it. TSR's seeming marketing strategy throughout the 1980s and 1990s -- release as many books as possible, charge about \$20 for each, and tell the fans that every one of them would be indispensable -- may have looked good on paper, but it only drove me even further away from the game than its antiquated rules set and overly rigid concepts had already done. With Wizards of the Coast at the helm, *3rd Edition D&D* has already enjoyed its share of controversy, but my big question ultimately was how they would approach the release of supplements: would the game stand alone? Would new supplements be optional, but of high enough quality to make them appealing despite the cost? Or would they continue the shell game, the Supplement Shuffle? I saw the *Hero Builder's Guidebook* as a good test of that question. And to my mind, Wizards passes the test. At least for now.

Although it never says so explicitly, the *Guidebook* is written for beginning gamers. From the Introduction on, it assumes nothing about the readers except that they've read the *Player's Handbook*: the Introduction starts with notes on what sets player characters apart from other characters, and the section on rolling ability scores explains the mathematics behind the dice and the rationale for the favored "roll 4 dice and drop the lowest" method. All of this material will be old-hat to veteran gamers, but it's just the sort of thing that helps an enthusiastic newbie understand exactly why the game does what it does. (As an aside, I particularly liked the mathematical stuff. All that cryptic bell curve material in the beginning of the first edition *Dungeon Master's Guide* was great for me to get a sense of what the ability scores really should have meant -- and that's what first clued me in to the shortcomings of *AD&D*, like the fact that only the upper 2% of the population were any different in their performance of the core actions of adventuring, like fighting or casting spells; the fact that *D&D3* threw *that* nonsense out the window was one of the things I liked best about it. But, on with the review.)

The meat of the *Guidebook* is the chapter on "Choosing Your Race and Class," a 30-page expansion of the brief but useful notes that accompanied each class description in the *Player's Handbook*. (You remember the original notes: "A gnome monk is such a goofy idea that your character must surely be special. Wing it." That sort of thing.) The *Guidebook* devotes a full section, from a quarter-page to a half-page, to each possible combination of race and class, with useful summaries of the class' role in the race's culture, the implication of racial bonuses and penalties to the class' requirements and activities, and class "variants" to offer quick and easy ideas for how a character of that particular class and race would fit into the world. It's all the kind of stuff that experienced gamers will figure out on their own, but it can get new players into the swing of things quickly.

"Creating Your Personal History" is essentially a collection of charts and tables for easy rolling-up of a character's background, from her type of home community to family life. (If anyone remembers Mayfair's *Role Aids* book on generating character backgrounds, it's like a condensed version of that.) Like most collections of charts and tables, it's theoretically useful, but I don't know how much it will actually get used. I played with the idea of writing a script to automate the thing for my own use in coming up with Instant NPCs so as not to tax my brain in the middle of a game,

but otherwise the greatest value in the charts will be in reminding players that the cultures of *D&D*'s fantasy world ought to be just as complex and subtle as those in our own world, and that they shouldn't serve to pigeonhole anybody into a cliched character concept.

"Selecting an Alignment" is an ethical questionnaire to help determine what alignment your character should be, and it ought to look familiar to psych. majors, guidance counselors, and anybody who's had to take an "ethics questionnaire" in order to get a sensitive job. "Are you in touch with childhood friends?" "Would you help an injured stranger on the side of the road?" "Would you kill someone in order to escape from jail?" Each possible answer gives you a number of points to tally, and the end result is a suggested alignment for the character. The same sort of thing has been on the Internet for several years. Like the Personal History charts, it's more useful as a way of illustrating the concepts of the alignments than as an actual method for character generation.

The last chapter, "Planning Your Future Career," offers several possible character types, using the standard classes and races, with recommended choices of skills and feats: how to create a Robin Hood-type archer, how to create a necromancer, how to create a swashbuckling swordsman, and so on. As before, none of it's going to be new to experienced players, but it can save a new player the trouble of figuring out the various combinations of skills and feats needed for that particular style of character he or she has in mind.

Finally, there's an appendix on naming characters, with notes on methods for coming up with names and titles, tips for maintaining atmosphere, and even bigger lists of sample names for each race than were included in the *Player's Handbook*. This was the weakest section of the book, with nothing that even a beginning player couldn't figure out immediately after reading the *Player's Handbook*; but it was only a 4-page appendix, after all, so no great loss.

At 64 pages, the *Hero Builder's Guidebook* (*PCs for Dummies* might have been a more apt title, but I suppose it would have confused a lot of beleaguered computer shoppers . . .) seems a little slim for its \$15 price tag, but it has its place. Experienced gamers might not get much out of it, but Dungeon Masters facing new players will find it immensely useful; it's just the sort of thing to hand to a couple of newbies, allowing them to get the hang of things on their own while you deal with a whole table of others clamoring for attention. And, let's face it: some of us are willing to pay hard cash for that kind of peace of mind.

-- *Shane Ivey*

Pyramid Review

Werewolf: The Apocalypse Revised Edition

Published by [White Wolf Publishing](#)



Written by Deirdre Brooks, Brian Campbell, Harry Heckel, Heather Heckel, Forrest Marchinton, Matt McFarland, Denna McKinney, Kyle Olson and Ethan Skemp

\$29.95

I'm going to start this review off with a statement of position. *Werewolf* is my favorite game of the Storyteller series. Unfortunately, I like it for all the wrong reasons. My style of play is generally termed "superheroes with fangs," and I see no problem with that. I love the fact that there's a race of inhuman creatures, organized along tribal lines, that are attempting to perform a duty they were charged with ages ago, and are failing miserably. The spiritualism of the game and the visceral charge it can deliver give me chills. The varieties of games that can be played, with an emphasis on any one of the game's aspects, fill my mind with possibilities.

So, yeah, I'm the developer's worst nightmare. But gamers tend to be annoying like that; the wrong people keep playing the wrong games.

So, what do I think of *Werewolf Revised*? I like it.

The basic concept behind *Werewolf* is as such: millennia ago, the Garou (werewolves) were charged by Gaia, the Earth spirit, with protecting the planet and safeguarding humanity (or safeguarding the planet from humanity, depending on who you ask).

They failed, and one of the great spirit forces of the universe, the Wyrms, has gone insane and is attempting to bring about the end of existence. The Garou, who've lost three of their tribes, one of which was even corrupted by the Wyrms itself, are on the losing end of this great war.

Revised is the game's third edition (fourth, if you count *Werewolf: The Wild West*). They've cleaned up a few things here and there. The game is, like any successful RPG these days must be, visually arresting. I don't think a single piece of art in it was sub-par. Each chapter has a full-page representation of one of the tribes as a header, along with a short fiction piece about each tribe. There's a new art series for illustrating combat, with two Garou fighting an Umbral beast of some kind; this is a bit of an improvement over previous editions, which had two Garou fighting it out. There's also a nice series of pieces to illustrate each of the lunar aspects.

The rules revision are mostly subtle, with clarifications and such. Many of the rules changes concern the spirit and Umbra rules. Garou no longer need a mirror to cross to the spirit realms; it's just easier for them to do it with one. Spirit combat has been pretty much completely changed; a Spirit's Rage is now the difficulty to damage it. A spirit's power is now equal to the sum of its three attributes.

Like with all the White Wolf game worlds, *Werewolf's* Revised edition has seen some changes. One of the tribes of the Garou Nation, the contemplative Stargazers, have left the nation to seek healing with the Beast Courts of Asia. There's still a little info available on them in the Allies section of the book. The world sections are revised and expanded. There are changes in the dialect of the Garou; non-werewolf shapechangers are now called 'Fera' instead of

Bete (which is good, because not too many Garou speak French). The book covers the red star approaching through the Umbra; named Anthelios, it's a harbinger of the coming Apocalypse, and relates to the events of the "Year of the Reckoning."

The Antagonists section is well realized; it contains info on the Black Spiral Dancers, the fallen Garou, as well as rules and info for Fomori and other foes. Garou Gifts (their magical abilities) are expanded. There's a number of new ones, particularly first level ones.

My biggest complaint with the book isn't with the content. It's the binding. Less than 24 hours after receiving my copy (I had barely done any reading) the back cover had begun to split from the book. Within a week, it had completely separated, being only attached by the spine.

So, the big question that comes with a new edition (or at least just a revision of a current edition), is it worth it buying for current players? It does a good job updating *Werewolf* in the six years since the second edition was released. It's pleasing visually, and is complete (one of many complaints I heard about the Revised edition of *Mage* released last year was that there wasn't as much information about the antagonists of the game).

The developers weren't able to copy the Revised edition of *Vampire* and include the optional Merits & Flaws system into the game, but rules and setting-wise, the game is complete. It's managed to help keep *Werewolf* at the top of my list of favorite games.

-- *Justin Mohareb*

Pyramid Review

Siege on Tolkeen 4: Cyber-Knights (for Rifts)

Published by [Palladium Books](#)

Written by Kevin Siembieda



112 pages; \$12.95

As the *Siege on Tolkeen* series has been released and developed, there have been two camps of readers who have voiced the strongest opinions about it. There are those that love it -- those who praise Siembieda for creating what may be the greatest set of books he has yet written in the *Rifts* series. And then there are those that hate it -- those who claim that Siembieda is ruining one of the greatest settings and plots that he had created when he penned the original book. The fact that Siembieda took ten years to get this series out (and left gamers ten years to anticipate it eagerly) could easily be why there's such a split between the satisfied and the disappointed.

There are strong and weak arguments on both sides of this fence, and I'm not about to make a point in favor of either. What I will say is that if you are among the *Rifts* gamers who have not been buying this series, then *SoT Book 4: Cyber-Knights* is the one book you may want to consider picking up.

The first thing one will notice when seeing it is the distinct cover. No, we're not talking about the bold artwork by Dave Dorman (which is pretty decent I might add). We're talking about the distinct change in font in which the title and subtitles are rendered. Although Palladium does rotate its cover fonts slightly, they seldom break form this strongly. The cover of this book clearly reads "Cyber Knights." The "Siege on Tolkeen Four" subtitle is all but unnoticeable until one inspects closer. So, we are immediately led to suspect that this book is being presented (even if just slightly) as a rogue in the series.

(Editor's note: At press time, we have been unable to find a version of the cover with the title on it.)

And when we read through it, we find that this is largely true. The vast majority of the book spends time developing and further exploring the saga of the Cyber-Knights -- a mystical order of modern "techno-knights" who were presented in the original core book. They have been a staple of the game and a favorite class of players for the entire time the game has been around.

The book starts with the same sort of introduction that the others have received (a fictional account of the war, told in first person by one of its survivors), but it quickly breaks into something else: an in depth reevaluation of the Cyber-Knight class. Not too much is changed, but a few little things are added here and there, and many things are further explained. Little tweaks include things such as a few more psionic abilities to choose from (for those who have them), more options for the psi-sword (like wielding two or changing the shape or color), and partial cybernetic body armor which now regenerates.

The major tweaks are, naturally, more noticeable, but none of them throw the class out of whack. In fact, they really bring it around to the elite warriors that these knights are supposed to be. The first is the addition of Cyber-Knight Zen combat -- a sort of spiritual awareness of machines and technological dangers that allows the Cyber-Knight to do some pretty amazing things, like disappear from a computer's sensors and predict an electronic weapon's attack. Though some may not like to see this class gain an ability that throws it further out of proportion from the other core classes, this new combat style really seems to suite the warriors well, and most gamers will likely be pleased with it.

Another new convention is that of the dream vision. At some time in their lives, all Cyber-Knights become recipients of a powerful dream with great significance in regard to their individual fate. For many, the dream becomes a quest that will span and define the knight's entire life. For others, it will remain a mystery that they will chase for all of their days. These dreams fit very well with the philosophy of the Cyber-Knights and its mystic origins, and, even better, it opens up all sorts of possibilities for roleplaying and character development. Sometimes Palladium's classes are a bit lacking on this end, so it's nice to see so many opportunities opened with this one.

Then we come upon the different paths of the Cyber-Knight. Siembieda avoids the possibility of creating a bunch of sub-classes, each with their own unique bonuses and negatives, in favor of basing these new divisions on more plot and character oriented elements. There are four types of Cyber-Knight: the courtier, the crusader, the hermetic knight, and the fallen knight. Examples of sample knights are given for each type, and these quick character sketches are pretty well-rounded and diverse overall. As opposed to just being filler, they actually manage to drive home Siembieda's points about the individual knight types pretty well.

The courtier is the traditional Cyber-Knight, as set forth previously in the core book. These knights follow the code of chivalry to the letter and spend their lives in strict pursuit of it. Siembieda takes the opportunity here to explore each of the tenets of the code. His analysis is a bit long-winded, but very thorough. Anyone with any misperceptions or confusions will likely find them answered here.

The crusaders are the die-hards that see themselves as glorious warriors, bound to spend their lives seeking perfection in their martial arts. They follow an additional four precepts: poverty, humility, purity, and generosity. These knights are very rugged and dogmatic in their beliefs, and their single-mindedness sometimes leads them to more critical faults, such as pride and arrogance.

Hermetic knights are those who have "retired" and gone into seclusion. For the most part these are the Obi-Wan types, who live in hiding, only coming out to train new faithfuls. The more elite of these hermits are also known as dream sages, and they serve as spiritual guides who help the Cyber-Knights in interpreting their dream visions.

The fallen knights are largely what you would expect . . . though, thankfully, Siembieda has fleshed them out as a dynamic group. The "anti-paladins" that some GMs just can't seem to avoid including in their campaigns are present, but they are the minority. The fallen knights fall into two types: those who have simply fallen from the order, unable to uphold the high responsibilities placed on them, and the blackguards, the *real* bad guys. The blackguards are in turn divided into three groups: the robber knights, those who run off to abuse their powers as bandits and mercenaries, the justicars, those knights who have taken code of chivalry way *too* far and punish all who fail to adhere to it with swift death, and the despoilers, the aforementioned anti-paladin types.

These new paths for the Cyber-Knights are well rounded out, and Siembieda sticks to providing new ways in which these characters may be roleplayed, instead of just giving them new super powers to run free with. It might have been nice to have another path more open to PCs (the hermetic knight and fallen knight are a bit tough), but players are bound to have a nice time exploring their characters with the ones there.

The history of the knights is explained in full, and their leader, Lord Coake, is finally exposed in detail. Those gamers who have been eagerly awaiting these details finally have them, and they are for the most part what you would expect. Overall, Siembieda's look into the lives of the Cyber-Knights is very thorough and dynamic. Those things that were hinted at in previous material are finally explained fully, and those Rifts gamers who have been waiting for them finally have the Cyber-Knights that they've always loved.

The book does, however, tie the Cyber-Knights into the campaign at Tolkeen . . . rather well, in fact. Few have been hit as hard by this conflict as the Cyber-Knights. What used to be a strong and unified order is now split in half. Their leader, Lord Coake, has ordered that no Cyber-Knights should participate in the conflict between Tolkeen and the Coalition States. Unfortunately, not all of them agree. Some see the CS as a major villain that should not be ignored, despite any faults that the leaders of Tolkeen might have (and they certainly *are* engaging in practices that violate the code of the knights). What makes the situation so complicated is that neither side is dead wrong. The knights fighting for Tolkeen do so for the greater good, just as those knights who abstain do. The real issue at hand is whether or not it's better to ally with a lesser evil to defeat a greater one or to abstain altogether and maintain one's honor and

principles. The answer is anything but clear, and the repercussions for the fellowship of the knights could be grave indeed. Just what happens in the end, though, will be up to the GMs and the players.

Overall, there is a lot of potential in this book. If you are not using the *Siege on Tolkeen* series, then you will still find something of use here. If you *are* using the *Siege on Tolkeen* series, then this book will add another dimension to your campaign that is sure to enhance it. In fact, this book would be an excellent one for launching a *Siege on Tolkeen* campaign off of as the primary source or focus. The book's only real drawback is that, well, it's all about Cyber-Knights. If you're not using the *SoT* series, and if you've no interest in Cyber-Knights (a definite possibility in the broad world of *Rifts*), then this book will be all but moot.

-- *Jon Thompson*



by **Steve Jackson**

Here are four scenarios created for *Ogre Battlefields* that -- due to space -- didn't make it into the final product.

"Breakthrough" Scenarios

Map G-3

Basic scenario setup. The defending player gets 20 strength points of regular infantry; each point of infantry may be traded for 2 militia. The defender also gets 3 engineer squads and 6 armor units of his choice. Defending units may be set up anywhere on the map except within 3 hexes of the S edge. Defending units are all exposed.

More Scenarios for Battlefields

The attacking player gets 16 armor units; any number may be GEVs, but note that the terrain does not favor them. Attackers move first and enter on the S edge of the map; the entry hex counts for movement. The attacker does not have to commit all his units on the first turn.



Special rules. At the beginning of every turn, the defender may place a single unready militia platoon in any town hex that has not been turned to rubble.

Escape. Attackers may leave the map on the N or S side; only N counts for victory points. Defenders may not escape.

Objectives and victory points. Exactly as per *G.E.V.* section 9.024, counting full value for any regular armor unit, half value for any LT or LGEV, and double for a SHVY. Note that destroyed town hexes do *not* give victory points.

Advanced scenario. Give the defender 4 more armor units and 3 more engineers. Give the attacker 8 more armor units.

Victory levels. As for map G-2.

Ogre scenario. As for "Breakthrough" on map S-2.

Map S-3

Basic scenario setup. The defending player gets 4 HWZ, 4 MHWZ, and 24 infantry. Any 2 infantry can be traded for one squad of either engineers or marines. These units may be set up anywhere on or east of the line of hexes whose

numbers begin with 05. The defender also gets 10 militia, which must be set up in town hexes.

The attacking player gets 12 GEVs and 12 LGEVs. Attackers move first and enter on the lake on the W edge of the map; the entry hex counts for movement. The attacker does not have to commit all his units on the first turn.

Special rules. All town hexes adjacent to the lake on the W side of the map are considered rubble. Other town hexes are undamaged.

Escape. Attackers may leave the map on the E or W side; only E counts for victory points. Defenders may not escape.

Objectives and victory points. Exactly as per *G.E.V.* section 9.024, counting full value for any regular armor unit, half value for any LT or LGEV, and double for a SHVY. Note that destroyed town hexes do *not* give victory points.

Advanced scenario. The attacker gets 16 of each unit type. The defender adds 3 superheavy tanks to the force described.

Victory levels. As for "Breakthrough" on map G-2.

Ogre scenario. The attacker gets the forces described in the advanced scenario. The defender gets the infantry and militia described in the basic scenario, plus two Mark IIIs, one in 1518 and the other in 1506. Even more than in the other scenarios, the defender has strength, but not enough flexibility.

"Raid" Scenarios

Map G-2

Basic scenario setup. The defending player gets 10 militia (in any town hexes; only one per hex); 12 squads of infantry (in any hex whose last two digits are 19 or less); one laser tower and one laser (anywhere); and 10 armor units. The armor units are not manned; set them all up as "disabled." The defender chooses one armor unit each turn to activate.

The attacking player gets 12 armor units. Attackers move first and enter on the S edge of the map; the entry hex counts for movement. The attacker does not have to commit all his units on the first turn.

Special rules. At the beginning of each movement phase, the defender rolls a die. On a 6, four GEVs enter the map on any water hex on the E side. The defender only gets these reinforcements once.

Escape. Attackers may leave the map on the S side; defenders may escape to any other side.

Objectives and victory points. As per *G.E.V.* section 9.034, except that there are no CPs; each river bridge is worth 8 points, and the town hexes at 1205 and 2003, as railhead ports, are worth 20 points each.

Advanced scenarios. The attacker gets (a) 16 or (b) 20 armor units. The defender adds (a) 4 more unmanned armor units, or (b) a single Cruise Missile Crawler with missile.

Victory levels. As per *G.E.V.* section 9.038.

Ogre scenario. The attacker enters with 24 armor units. The defender has the basic scenario setup and a single Ogre Mark III in hex 1607.

Map S-2

Basic scenario setup. The defending player gets 18 infantry, which can be traded for marines, engineers, or militia (2 INF per marine or engineer, or 1 INF for 2 militia). The defender also gets 10 armor units, none of which may be

GEVs, and 5 large revetments; any large revetment may be traded for 2 small ones. These units may be set up anywhere within the loop to the N and W of the river; no defending units may be set up to the S or W of the river.

The defender has two CPs (Alpha and Beta; both mobile with defense 2). One starts at 2117 and the other at 1413. The defender also has three structures, which must be set up outside town hexes: two lasers and one laser tower.

The attacking player gets 24 armor units. Attackers move first and enter on the E edge of the map; the entry hex counts for movement. The attacker does not have to commit all his units on the first turn.

Special rules. The 5-hex town at the west edge of the map is already rubble.

Escape. Attackers may leave the map on the E side; defenders may not escape.

Objectives and victory points. As per *G.E.V.* section 9.034, except that river bridges (including the RR bridge) are worth 8 each, the lasers are worth 20 points each, and the laser tower is worth 35 points.

Advanced scenario. The attacker also gets 3 GEV-PCs, each with 3 squads of infantry. The defender gets another 12 infantry (or equivalent) and 4 LT, which may be set up anywhere except within 3 hexes of the S map edge.

Victory levels. As per *G.E.V.* section 9.038.

Ogre scenario. The defender substitutes a single Fencer for all his armor and revetments; the attacker has the setup described for the advanced scenario.

Murphy's Rules



by John Kovalic

Murphy's Rules



Murphy's Rules



Verily, Just Gimmie That Rock 'n' Roll Music

This column begins as a not-terribly-funny anecdote, turns into specific advice, veers off into metaphor, picks up a Cherry Coke, and drops you off in time for this week's quote.

We'd been gaming almost exclusively in a *Vampire: Dark Ages* campaign for a couple of years. It was set in Wales, and was steeped in the politics and history of the time (at least, as steeped in history as you can be when you've got vampires and faeries running around).

Finally, we added another campaign to the gaming mix: *In Nomine* (set in modern times).

And as we were preparing for that first session, I said (pulling out a Depeche Mode CD), "Well, I'm really glad we're playing something modern, so I can use some more contemporary music."

"Oh? Why's that?" asked Dennis.

"Because if I heard something by Enya again, I was going to need to find my staple gun."

Well, I'm sure we can all guess who the performer that Dennis picked for the second CD. And, no, I never did find my staple gun.

(That was the anecdote. If you'll look out the right window, you'll see we're just coming up on the specific advice.)

Now, I'm sure for many people's roleplaying campaigns, music is as much a part of the environment as Mountain Dew, bean bag chairs, and bowls of Corn Bugles (a.k.a. mini-Doomsday Devices). But I'd also guess that many folks feel (as I did) that the music you play should have something to do with the setting you're in (or at least be close): Celtic music for medieval fare, *Star Wars* soundtracks for space opera, Metallica for nihilipunk campaigns, and the like.

But last week I saw *Fantasia 2000* (a movie that I enjoyed, despite the lukewarm response it got from critics, and the fact that it was only 72 minutes long). One of the segments in this movie was a retelling of Noah's Ark with Donald Duck set to *Pomp and Circumstance* (three concepts that my mind instinctually says don't go together, like McDonald's, breakfast, and burritos). And that segment was really neat.

And afterwards I thought, "Why am I knocking myself out trying to find period music for my gaming sessions?" I mean, if a tune usually associated with high school graduation to most Americans (I don't know about the rest of the world) can be equally applicable to an anthropomorphic duck acting as an agent of the Lord, why *can't* I play whatever I darn well please?

And after thinking about it, I realized that movies have already been doing this for a while. The 1996 modern retelling of *Romeo and Juliet*, starring that kid from *Growing Pains*, featured a modern setting with entirely modern music. A *Midsummer Night's Dream* used Italian opera to great effect. And it's difficult to listen to the *William Tell Overture* the same way again after watching *Clockwork Orange*.

(At this time I also remembered that I liked playing the *Tie Fighter* computer game with the Cars Greatest Hits CD instead of the usual soundtrack.)

Now, obviously the developers of these movies were making careful decisions about the world they wanted their music to develop. But they didn't limit themselves to the time frames their pieces were (originally) set in, or music that necessarily even made sense. If Terry Gilliam can use "Brazil" in the quasi-cyberpunk movie of the same name, why can't the fae courts be singing Depression-era ballads? Why can't jazz define a space campaign? What kind of campaign would feature dungeon crawls set to ska?

So I've decided to remember that, in my next campaign, just because I'm playing in (say) an Imperial Rome game

doesn't necessarily mean I need to reach for the *Gladiator* soundtrack. I could just as easily make a mix CD with songs like "The Brazilian" from Genesis, "Army of Me" from Bjork, and tracks from the *Beetlejuice* soundtrack (or, really, almost anything by Danny Elfman).

(As an aside, I have a CD called *Bach Meets the Beatles*, which is, as it sounds, music by the Beatles done in the style of Bach. I really wish I would have remembered it for our *Fading Suns* campaign; given the religious themes of that 51st century game, I think that's *just* the sort of music that might be reinterpreted in a more religious light.)

Now, having realized this fact about music and role-playing campaigns, I started veering into more metaphoric realms.

If music from different genres and eras can collide, why am I stuck on producing "true" campaigns? In this way, music is merely a metaphor for the larger issue. When I start, say, a Cyberpunk campaign, why can't I mix genres and moods in the same way?

In movies this melding can be done for serious and/or thematic reasons; *Ghost Dog* melds African-American rap with Asian philosophy (with a helping heap of an askew Mafia perspective). *Magnolia* mixes biblical elements with a more traditional ensemble piece. *Doctor Who* combined science fiction with an Oscar Wildeian outlook (in the most recent movie, this was seasoned with a steampunk influence). *Mystery Men* melds a jillion different periods into its city, producing a world that is timeless but definitely not of our time.

This melding can also be done for comedic effect. *Aladdin* combines an Arabian atmosphere with the sensibilities of a Hope & Crosby movie. *Jack of All Trades*, *Xena*, and others play fast and loose with history, creating a world where the stories are unfettered by accuracy. (And, in the RPG world, scifi elements tend to crash-land on fantasy worlds all the time. The twelve-year-old in me still giggles with glee every time I read *Expedition to the Barrier Peaks*.)

So I'm considering running, say, an optimistic swashbuckling campaign set in a post-apocalyptic world. Or a *Shadowrun* campaign rolled back to the 1950s, making a darkly *Atomic Horror*-esque fantasy/cyber world. Or an *In Nomine* campaign where Heaven feels not unlike *The Prisoner* . . . perhaps downplaying the Marches and augmenting the roll of the Eastern religions/beliefs.

In a lot of ways, one of my biggest challenges as a gamer (both player and GM) is to keep from limiting myself by my own pigeonholed expectations. It's easy to play all Jedi, all fighters, all scientists the same. It's easy to create worlds that are what people expect. But to keep things interesting and fresh -- to make them (and you) wanting to come back each week -- it can be worth mixing things up, combining elements to make something new and unique.

So, from now on, I'm not going to be ignorant of the possibility of using elements of Aztec culture when devising the government of my far-futuristic empire. Or elements of Illuminati conspiracy in a 1940s World War II campaign.

Or Enya in my *Cthulhu by Gaslight* games.

-- Steven Marsh (drinking a Cherry Coke)

* * *

Last week's answer: 1993 TSR Master Catalog -- Collector's Edition hardback, p. ii. (This was a \$9.95 hardback of a catalog. I'm deeply curious as to why I have it . . . let alone why I *still* have it.)

(*Three stars*) "STUDENTS CIRCULATE PETITION CONDEMNING REPRESSION: NO EFFECT."

Heart of Weirdness: The Congo

"There were moments where one's own past came back to one . . . but it came in the shape of an unrestful and noisy dream, remembered with wonder amongst the overwhelming realities of this strange world of plants, and water, and silence. And this stillness of life did not in the least resemble a peace. It was the stillness of an implacable force brooding over an inscrutable intention."

-- Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*

In the heart of the oldest continent, of the literal primordial soup wherein mankind was formed, lies a mystery. Compared to the Congo River, the Nile is an Autobahn, and even the storied Amazon an interstate. But there have only been two scientific descents of the entire Congo in history -- and the first one mapped out the land for more efficiency in murder. Ever since Conrad wrote his novel, based on his own experiences in Leopold's genocidal slave state, the journey up the Congo has emblemized any journey into evil, or nightmare, or madness, or mystery. Which makes it a suitable course to set for your players, between the cannibals and the crocodiles and into the horror -- the horror.

*"Through sixty-six and seven they fought the Congo war
With their fingers on their triggers, knee-deep in gore
For days and nights they battled the Bantu to their knees
They killed to earn their living and to help out the Congolese."*

-- Warren Zevon and David Lindell, "Roland the Headless Thompson Gunner"

The Congo remains a feverish theater in the conspiratorial history of the 20th century. When Belgium, after a century of misrule, panicked and left the Congo to its own devices in 1960, local politics fell into the hands of a tiny number of *evolués* -- literally, "the evolved" -- Westernized Congolese with little in the way of public support and less in the way of a functioning national system. Patrice Lumumba and Joseph Kasavubu had the most support of anyone -- and had vastly divergent notions of what to do with it. Lumumba sought Soviet aid, for which the CIA tried to kill him -- but eventually turned him over to the separatist troops of Moïse Tshombe deep in the Katanga. Lumumba died in January 1961 under the eyes of Tshombe's Western advisers. The Soviets accused UN Secretary General Dag Hammarskjöld of complicity in the murder -- and Hammarskjöld's plane crashed mysteriously that September. Tshombe's independence movement was crushed, and he joined Kasavubu's government, only to face another separatist movement in Kivu, this one sponsored by Communist China. (And using magic to make itself bulletproof.) Coup followed rebellions followed counter-coups, and by 1969 Tshombe was in exile after his plane was hijacked to Algeria, Kasavubu was dead, and CIA client Joseph Mobutu was President of the Congo. Mobutu unified the Congo by murdering or co-opting anyone who opposed him -- until another rebel movement, led by one of those magical Communist fighters named Laurent Kabila, overthrew him -- again, say the Congolese, with CIA aid. Kabila, of course, was just assassinated almost 40 years to the day after the death of Patrice Lumumba -- while waging war against his previous sponsors in Uganda.

*"Listen to the yell of Leopold's ghost
Burning in Hell for his hand-maimed host.
Hear how the demons chuckle and yell
Cutting his hands off, down in Hell."*

-- Vachel Lindsay, "Congo"

But this river of blood goes deeper yet into the jungle. From the beginning of history (which, in the Congo, is about 1490), the story of the Congo is a story of violent death, wanton needless cruelty, and the depths of human evil. The Portuguese connived at the destabilization of a Christian kingdom at the mouth of the river in order to nurture the slave trade there. Later European rulers would not be so finicky; the Belgian king Leopold II starved, enslaved, murdered, mutilated, and worked to death over 10 million Congolese -- most of whom had been Christianized by the missionaries his "Congo Free State" was theoretically there to protect and support. Desperate nations, deep in the interior, launched rebellion after rebellion, only to fall to tribal treason -- and the Hotchkiss gun. Finally, Leopold's death ended the first

mass genocide of the century, although if the Belgian government proved less sadistic it was only slightly less brutal. Reliable rumors hint that Leopold's old whips and mutilating knives were called back into service when the Belgian Congo's rubber had to keep the Allies rolling in World War II -- and when its uranium had to power the Manhattan Project, and 150,000 more deaths.

Death, then, not only stays in the Congo; it emerges. From the Congolese jungle comes Ebola, and from the Cameroonian highlands just north of the Congo basin, they say, comes AIDS. (Unless the CIA cooked them both up back there, in between assassinations.) Diseases of the spirit, too, seem to flow out of the Congo -- the Kongo "nation" of vodoun loa maintain the underlying basis of Petro, the vodoun "hot" rites of cruelty, gunpowder, and death. (From this nation, too, comes Congo Square, the New Orleans plaza where the city, as far back as colonial times, kept voodoo rites in the guise of public dances.) The Congo murders by retail, as well as wholesale. Luc Jouret, the grand master of the mass-suicidal Order of the Solar Temple, was born in the Belgian Congo in 1947 -- and Victoria's psychic, Robert Lees, identified a London house of Leopold II as the house of Jack the Ripper.

"What but some great creature like the Amali could account for the broken ivories we used to come across in the so-called elephant cemeteries? Fine old green ivory that's valuable for inlaying wood. Snapped right across in the thickest part and left in splinters. Aye! There's places in Africa where you get visions of primeval force. And not so distant either, as when you picture the prehistorics in Europe and America . . . But 'tis a thing of the dead past there. In Africa the Past has hardly stopped breathing."

-- Alfred A. Horn, *Trader Horn* (1927)

Something dead, something old, something cthonic and powerful. Ever since the French traveler Abbé Proyart described three-foot tracks of an animal "not seen but . . . monstrous" in 1776, word has filtered out of these swamps of a great lizard, a beast larger than a crocodile or a hippo, with a long neck and tail. It's called the *amali* or *chipekwe* or *n'yamala* or *jago-nini* or, as it's best known, The One Who Stops The Flow Of Rivers, Mokele-Mbembe. It sounds, to cryptozoologists, rather like a dinosaur, possibly an apatosaurus since the Mokele-Mbembe eats only a kind of local lotus, and not the local Pygmies. The Pygmies have played their own role in mythography, being legendary for their warlike skills as far away as ancient Greece and Babylon. In Babylon, in fact, we see giant lizards called *sirrush* carved proudly on the Ishtar Gate, ramping with the extinct aurochs bison over the characteristic Babylonian field of blue-glazed bricks. Blue-glazed bricks such as the ones allegedly brought out of the Congo Basin around 1905 by animal collector Hans Schomburgh -- who was on the trail of a "huge monster, half elephant, half dragon." The image of Nebuchadnezzar's Jurassic Park seems somehow to fit alongside the roiling timestream of the Congo.

"Quap, sir, is the most radio-active stuff in the world . . . It's a festering mass of earths and heavy metals, polonium, radium, ythorium, thorium, carium, and new things, too. There's a stuff called Xk -- provisionally. There they are, mucked up together in a sort of rotting sand. What it is, how it got made, I don't know. It's like as if some young creator had been playing about there. There it lies in two heaps, one small, one great, and the world for miles about it is blasted and scorched and dead. You can have it for the getting. You've got to take it -- that's all!"

-- Gordon-Nasmyth, in *Tono-Bungay*, by H.G. Wells

And there's anomalies still more ancient back in the darkness. Around 1.8 billion years ago (when Lovecraft's Old Ones were raising their shoggoths and their basalt cities in the steaming mud flats of the Paleozoic), the Oklo uranium field in southeastern Gabon suddenly, spontaneously, went critical. Composed of 70% pure uranium dioxide, of which 3% was U-235, at least fifteen sites in a twenty-mile radius became water-cooled breeder reactors, boiling plutonium-239 out of their rocky substrates. A French nuclear analyst discovered the Oklo phenomenon in 1972, and it remains almost unique. There's another "natural reactor" at Bangombe, 20 miles closer yet to the Congo -- and there's plenty of 70% pure ore back in the Katanga, that Leopold's heirs killed for, and that Lumumba and Tshombe died for.

It was over those mines, in fact, that a CIA asset saw two flying, fiery disks in March of 1952, and in October of 1963 Project Moon Dust recovered "a fragment of metal" described as the result of a "mid-air explosion" over Xerekena, Congo. Later military analysis (as given in a now-declassified, but consummately uninformative, "Exploitation Report") indicated that it had withstood intense heat, and was "smoothly rounded" -- a tardy Old One probe coming back to check on the crinoid things' breeder reactor sites?

"Those are just little molecular centres of disintegration, of that mysterious decay and rotting of those elements, elements once regarded as the most stable things in nature. But there is something -- the only word that comes near it is CANCEROUS -- and that is not very near, about the whole of [it], something that creeps and lives as a disease lives by destroying; an elemental stirring and disarrangement, incalculably maleficent and strange."

-- H.G. Wells, *Tono-Bungay*

Strange metal, magical massacres, nuclear reactors seemingly thrown back in time and dinosaurs swimming forward through history into the gates of Babylon. Something has twisted up reality, balled it like a linen rag and hurled it back into the jungle. The Congo Basin is the home to a myriad of fictional lost cities -- Haggard's *Kôr* ruled by She Who Must Be Obeyed, Lovecraft's *Grey City of the White Apes*, Burroughs' golden *Opar* and Crichton's *diamantine Zinj*. But in the real world, even the real world of pseudoarchaeology, it boasts only those fragments of Babylonian brick. No famous "lost city" worthy of the name lurks in that basin on the far side of the *Mountains of the Moon* -- quite literally, for the Greeks, off the edge of the world. Could these fictions, then, be the decayed and depleted remnants of realities themselves lost, the trace elements and ghost particles that tell us that the *Old Ones*, at least, dreamed of cities here? Did *Nebuchadnezzar's* priests build a watchtower on the edge of the papyrus swamp to capture stray *allosaurs* and to see the true face of the gods in the mists at the edge of the world? Do mass murders sleet like gamma radiation from the fast-breeding decay of reality? Did the *UFOs* spring like alpha particles from the slaughter-cooled *transuranium* reactors deep in the Congo? Did *Kennedy* kill *Lumumba* to get his hands on that metal fragment from a prehuman fiction? Do the dinosaurs serve as temporal brakes, the *cadmium* rods keeping the *River of Time* from melting down in the white-hot heart of darkness? Send your *PCs* up the river -- and find out.

Dork Tower!



Dork Tower!





Blue Genes

by James L. Cambias

This adventure is suitable for most backgrounds between tech level 8 and TL12.

The Job

The player characters are contacted by a woman called "Ms. Lazarus," who wants them for a rather unusual job. One of the tragedies of the early days of interstellar exploration was the extinction of the Ineema of Tau Ceti II. Ms. Lazarus claims to represent a group devoted to restoring extinct species like the Ineema by locating samples of their DNA and creating clones. Her organization has located a sample of Ineema tissue, but the owner refuses to let them have it. So she is offering the group \$50,000 apiece to steal it.

The tissue sample in question is a chair, upholstered in the distinctive iridescent blue hide of a male Ineema. It belongs to billionaire Saut Silver, and is kept on his private space station orbiting Saturn. Ms. Lazarus can provide photos of the chair and old plans of the station. She can arrange for transport aboard a stealthy orbital shuttle; everything else is up to the PCs.

There are a couple of things "Ms. Lazarus" isn't telling the adventurers. The first is that she's working for Calvin Biotechnics, a corporation which wants the chair in order to make a killing marketing blue Ineema hide for everything from wallets to ottomans. When Calvin Biotechnics made Silver an offer, he refused. The company is using the player characters so that there will be no connection between the robbery and the company.

The second thing is that Ms. Lazarus has decided to run a little side operation of her own. Saut Silver is working on a new design for a hyper-stealthy space plane which will make all existing aerospace fighters obsolete. There are people willing to pay enormous sums for a look at Silver's designs, and Ms. Lazarus has been in touch with some of them. She has engaged a separate group of agents to invade the station and steal some of Silver's technical data. Lazarus figures that the two teams will divide the attention of Silver's security guards, so that at least one group will get out successfully.

Saut Silver

Saut Silver is a leading spacecraft designer, whose genius has made his company, Argentech, one of the most successful makers of air and space vehicles. As his wealth has grown, so have Silver's eccentricities. He is an obsessive collector of rarities, and has accumulated a vast museum of singular objects. (His reason for turning down the Calvin Biotechnics offer was that cloning the Ineema would mean that his blue chair would no longer be unique.) Silver is also somewhat paranoid about his privacy, and employs doubles and sophisticated robots to make many of his

For an explanation of the Iron Ref rules and a list of the secret ingredients, please see the [Introduction](#).

public appearances.

The Plan

If the players enjoy planning out complicated capers, they can play through all the stages of preparing the mission, getting special equipment, and learning everything they can about Silver's space station. If they don't enjoy that kind of thing, Ms. Lazarus can handle much of the planning and preparation.

Characters with skill in space piloting, astronomy or astrogation can make a very useful discovery on a successful roll. There is a brief window coming up during which Silver's space station will be in the shadow of Saturn while all the other inhabited moons and space colonies will be on the other side. For a period of six hours, the station will be cut off from all communication. A perfect time for a robbery, especially since a search of news services reveals that Silver will be on Earth to attend a conference during that period.

The choice of weapons and equipment are up to the players. If they let Ms. Lazarus supply their gear, she will provide non-lethal weapons for the team (her employers at Calvin Biotechnics don't want to be connected with murder). Depending on the Tech Level of the campaign, this can be anything from gyrojet guns loaded with tranquilizer-dart rounds to electrolasers to neural disruptors. There is a budget of about \$20,000 for equipment, but Ms. Lazarus gets to keep anything the party doesn't spend. (Her own team is a gang of hardened crooks who are supplying their own weapons and are perfectly willing to kill anyone they meet.)

The Station

Silver's space station is a relic from the early days of settlement around Saturn. It is a rotating ring of twelve converted fuel tanks, linked to a central hub. The station originally housed ice miners working in Saturn's rings. With each tank divided into three levels the station could hold up to 500 people. Hydroponic farms supplied oxygen and food, and a pair of fusion power plants kept everything running. Each of the twelve modules is 100 feet long and 30 feet across. The entire station is 300 feet across and spins three times a minute to produce half a standard gee. The central core holds the spacedock and power plants, and is connected to the outer ring by two spokes.

Iron Ref: Science Fiction -- Blue Genes

That's what the party can learn from old data files and the plans provided by Ms. Lazarus. Since Silver bought the place he has made substantial alterations, but has kept the details secret. If the players can find someone who has visited or worked for Silver, they may be able to provide more information.



The current layout is greatly changed from the original design. Silver didn't like the claustrophobic feel of the old station's eight-foot ceilings and narrow corridors, so he ripped out many of the decks and bulkheads, so that most of the modules are immense single rooms.

Module 1

This module is Silver's living quarters. The upper floor has a glass ceiling with a fantastic view of Saturn and the stars. It is furnished with eighteenth-century furniture and a huge curtained bed which once belonged to Louis XIV. The walls are lined with bookshelves. The lower level has a medical clinic, and Silver's personal shelter.

Module 2

This unit is where Silver works. The upper room has a highly advanced computers and a large holoprojector tank to display designs. The lower level has a machine shop with robot fabricating machines to make mockups and test units. The computer has sophisticated security programming and a retina scanners so that only Silver can operate it. Ms. Lazarus's team are planning to just take the whole computer and let a professional hacker get into it later.

Module 3

This entire module is a swimming pool (and freshwater tank for the whole station). Bridges connect the access tunnels, but otherwise the module contains nothing but water. The bottom of the pool is transparent, so that swimmers can look down at Saturn spinning by.

Module 4

This module is guest quarters, and is still set up with three levels. The top level is a glass-roofed parlor furnished like a Victorian bordello, and the lower levels each have ten guest rooms.

Module 5

This module houses part of Silver's collection. It is a huge single chamber with no lower level, and is devoted to extremely large objects. The unit contains an old Soyuz capsule, a colossal alien stone head, part of the Berlin Wall, a giant penny, and various other big curiosities.

Module 6

This module contains Silver's collection of art objects. The upper level holds sculpture, the lower level is devoted to paintings.

Module 7

This unit is Silver's miscellaneous collection. The three levels hold objects as diverse as a jewel-encrusted falcon, an old Chevy Malibu, a container of radioactive isotopes, a sled, a clay cup, a gilded chest and some preserved alien bodies.

Module 8

This module is storage space. The upper level has unused furniture and carpets, the middle and lower levels are big freezers for food. The chair is on the top level.

Module 9

This module is a truck garden, growing unusual varieties of exotic fruits and vegetables. The lower level houses irrigation pumps and nutrient tanks.

Module 10

This module is the domain of Silver's human servants. It is set up with three levels. The top floor is a recreation area. The lower levels have ten rooms each for servants, secretaries and bodyguards, though the station usually has only ten people on the staff (butler, cook, shuttle pilot, technician, trainer, curator, maid, gardener, and two bodyguards).

Module 11

This unit is a garden, planted with rare varieties of flowering shrubs. One end is a hedge maze. The lower level houses irrigation pumps and nutrient tanks.

Module 12

This unit is the dining area. The upper level is a glass-roofed dining room with a huge oak table. The lower level is a very well-equipped kitchen and large freezers.

The Big Day

Depending on what the players have planned, they can either try to talk their way into the station, fool the security scanners at the docking bay, or else breach the walls of the station with demolition charges. Once inside, they have to find the chair and get out. Naturally, there are problems.

Problem Number One

Unfortunately, Saut Silver is not on Earth. He suffered an eye injury during testing of a laser weapon system at the Mars Proving Ground, and so he sent a double to the conference and returned to the station. He didn't bring the full staff along -- only Georges Bloch, the chef; Toshiro Ito, the gardener; Sergei Feodorov, the technician; Giulia Dandolo, the curator of Silver's collection; and Jesus Santiago, Silver's bodyguard.

Problem Number Two

The team hired by Ms. Lazarus to steal the space plane designs began their operation shortly before the PCs. As the player characters' shuttle approaches the station, they can detect a distress beacon and see another spacecraft clamped to the top of Module 11. The second team consists of six professional killers armed with military-grade weapons and light body armor. By the time the PCs arrive, the other team has already killed Santiago, Ito and Feodorov. Ms. Dandolo is hiding in Module 5, and M. Bloch is on the lower level of Module 8.

The second team has left two people to guard their exit in Module 11, while the other four have gone through Module 12 and are currently in Module 1 battling robots.

Problem Number Three

When the station was attacked, Silver himself got into his emergency shelter and took control of the station's systems to fight off the invaders. The shelter is heavily armored and has its own power and life support systems. It is effectively a little spaceship which can survive even if the station itself is blasted apart.

The station's defenses were designed to prevent people from docking without permission, and control movement between modules. It was not intended to stop a heavily-armed group equipped with breaching charges. As a last-ditch measure, Silver has sent all the station's robots into battle. There are four gardening robots equipped with buzz saws and clippers, six cleaning robots with caustic detergent sprayers, and two humanoid robots built to look like Silver himself. All the work robots are small spider-shaped machines with multiple tool-tipped arms. The humanoid robots can use normal hand weapons, and are superhumanly strong.

Problem-Solving

Since the station is under attack when the party arrives, the players must decide whether to take Silver's side, help the other team, fight against both, or simply try to keep hidden and accomplish their mission. The other team knows the PCs are going to be on the station, but don't know what they look like and are likely to shoot any strangers without

stopping to chat. Silver can talk to all the intruders through the station intercom, but is naturally suspicious of these armed lunatics invading his home. Game Masters who want to encourage ethical behavior may remind their players that Silver's robots can take pictures of the PCs, identifying them as members of the dangerous gang of criminals. Saut Silver can be a very useful patron in later adventures: for starters, he's going to need someone to track down Ms. Lazarus.

Dork Tower!



Dork Tower!



Murphy's Rules



by John Kovalic

Murphy's Rules



Murphy's Rules



Pyramid Sweeps Month

In theory, I hate the idea of "sweeps weeks."

For those of you not familiar with them, sweeps weeks are how American television networks (I'm not sure about the rest of the world) determine their advertising rates for the year. The basic idea is that each network pulls out all the stops and puts on their best programming for one week; whatever gets the best ratings can charge the most for their advertising.

Now, the annoyance for me is that it often seems like the networks are holding back on showing their best stuff for weeks (or even months) before the sweeps period. So for what feels like an eternity you're forced to endure absolute drek . . . then every show you might possibly be interested in is suddenly trying to be on their best behavior. So whenever I see, say, a network toting how neat their February is, all I can think of is how unimpressive their January was.

Now, having said that . . . um . . . *<koff koff>* I think we have a pretty neat February.

I've told you all about the time I tested the limits of my players' consciousness, when I ran an ultra-long Supers adventure [way past everyone's bedtimes](#). But in hindsight, there was another element that may have led somewhat to that evening's disappointment. In essence, that adventure was an attempt to create something of a "sweeps week" feel; I *had* been holding back somewhat in previous week's adventures, because I knew there were so many cool plot points coming up in that big überadventure, I didn't want anything competing with it.

Which, in hindsight, was really dumb.

I really didn't need to worry about competing with myself; there's something to be said for delivering consistent quality material, and I suspect everyone might have been happier if I'd only spread out some of the excitement over several adventures.

But I also remember an adventure I did for the *Star Trek* game I ran. (This was many years post-FASA, and several years pre-Last Unicorn.) Set in the time of the Enterprise-C, I'd been running each adventure in a *very* episodic format: scripts with the pre-ominous horns "teaser," the ritual playing of the theme song, printouts of each episode's title, wrapping up *everything* by the end of each adventure . . . the whole shebang. Now, this adventure was the next-to-last in the mini-series I was running, and it was a pretty complex adventure. And exciting things were happening, and everyone was into it, and there were a *lot* of balls in the air. And then, after a particularly climactic revelation . . .

I whipped out the "To Be Continued" sign.

It was completely unexpected for my players, and they let out an "Ieee!" in frustration and anticipation. They wanted to know what happened next, but they were also content to revel in the cliffhanger. I'd surprised them, and it felt *good*. Because I'd also surprised myself. And the next week we got together, I had a recap script, and we concluded the two-parter. Those were, arguably, the best adventures of that series.

Now, what does this have to do with the price of dice in Peoria? Well, I realized that my problem with sweeps weeks isn't that they're doing something special, per se . . . it's the "Enjoy our specialness or we shoot this puppy!" aspect of it. In essence, they're not doing something neat, new, and nifty because they have the urge; they're doing something because market forces dictate they do it. Likewise in my Supers campaign I was trying to force something cool onto my players, and as a result, I don't think they enjoyed it as much. On the other hand, in my *Star Trek* campaign I was able to integrate a surprise in a way that didn't feel gratuitous, but instead seemed organic. Which, in my opinion, should be how "sweeps" should work.

So what I'm trying to say (in my inimitable rambling way) is that, for the next month, I'm going to try to surprise you - and myself -- with something different. This week we have our almost-entirely *Iron Chefy* issue . . . but I hope you

don't think you need to be a fan to enjoy the results. "Iron Ref," in particular, is only vaguely tied to the show, and should be good for an idea (or three) for your adventures.

This week we also have a [chat](#) with John Kovalic on Wednesday, February 7th. And on Friday the 9th we're having a *Summer of Horror* chat event, with Kenneth Hite, Hunter Johnson, Sean Punch, and Philip Reed.

Why are we doing this? Well, partly to see if I can't reach my goal of hitting 4000 subscribers this month, but mostly because there are a lot of interesting things happening with me *besides* the magazine (like [GURPS Best of Pyramid I](#)). February is a good month, and I hope to have some surprises. Next week I hope to have a Valentine's Day themed issue (for which I'm still looking for a submission or two, if you've been meaning to write . . .).

So, while I definitely don't think we've been slacking here (and I sure hope you all don't think so, either), I do like dressing up in the metaphorical tux every so often. We're trying some different things (some of which may work, some of which may not; for pity's sake, [jot me a note](#) or post to the [discussion boards](#) and let me know!), while still doing what we've always done.

In short, welcome to our sweeps month. We hope you enjoy, and we hope you have the ability to be surprised as much as we try to surprise ourselves.

(Speaking of surprises, you may want to check out the larger version of the art in this week's *Star Wars CCG* article . . . just click on the smaller version. Thanks, Keith!)

* * *

Oh, and happy first birthday to our sister publication [Journal of the Travellers' Aid Society!](#)

-- Steven Marsh

* * *

Last week's answer: **Junta** political card.

(Four stars) "Game sent to Peru by Sleepy Shippers: Any Game in Sales -- Down One Level!"



A Night Like Every Other

by Justin Achilli

It's winter, and a chill rain falls in the early night. As each of the characters retrieves her mail, she finds a simple, off-white envelope with her name and address written by hand in a labored script. The letter bears no return address. Rain has caused the ink to run on the envelope, leaving blue blemishes and streaks on the envelope's surface.

For an explanation of the Iron Ref rules and a list of the secret ingredients, please see the [Introduction](#).

The letter reads:

Greetings, [character's name];

I hope my letter finds you well. You won't you remember me; the last time I saw you, you were only two or three years of age. I am your cousin, thrice removed. A family matter has recently arisen and I would like to meet with you to discuss it. I have sent this same invitation to other cousins here in the city as well. Although the concern that has made this reunion necessary is a grave one, I hope that me may take whatever joy we can in each other's company.

Please visit the hotel where I make my home: The Wilkinson Terrace. I will tell the concierge to expect you, and to please show you up to my room. If I am not present when you arrive, please make yourself comfortable -- I will return in a matter of moments.

Please arrive this Friday evening just after dinnertime.

Sincerely,

Roland Camberly

The letter includes no phone number or other point of contact.

Prep Work

Gamemasters planning to run "A Night like Every Other" will need to do a little work beforehand. Before the game session, the gamemaster should encourage the players to create characters who have some common ancestor. This can be a parent, making certain characters siblings, or it can be any relation however far back in the family genealogy the player wants to go.

Also, the gamemaster must decide to which character the situation at the end of the story applies. Although he may

choose at random or at the climax of the story, he will probably want to make his decision at the beginning, so that he may foreshadow the events that lead to the end (occluding the character's memory, describing how uncharacteristically exhausted she feels . . .).

Also, see the end of the story for further concerns.

Guests and Visitations

The gamemaster may have the characters receive the notes any night he wants -- giving the characters some time before the "reunion" will allow them to do research, check out the hotel, and do anything else they want before meeting Roland. This allows the gamemaster to build the characters' histories, perhaps even introducing them as they run into each other at the library while looking for family secrets. Gamemasters should build as many ties between the characters as they can, whether artificially ("As it turns out, Stephen's mother had Virginia first, but gave her up for adoption.") or by letting the players themselves expand their backgrounds to accommodate.

Visits to the Wilkinson Terrace reveal it to be a pleasant place, if a bit musty and antique. The concierge won't allow characters to wander the halls, though they may wait in the lobby. Regardless of how long they wait, though, they never see anyone exit or enter. If they question the concierge, he explains that the hotel is almost completely residential -- only a few of the rooms are let in traditional hotel style; the rest of the building is private apartments. Characters who wish to do a little unsanctioned reconnaissance find the hallways similarly empty, with row after row of almost identical doors. Those stalking the halls should have a feeling of walking in a dream or state of hallucination. Only if the character makes an explicit attempt to look do the letters on the door become clear, and even then, the details swim into a haze as the character looks away. Murky sounds may be heard from behind the walls at times, but they sound miles away, or as if they were happening underwater.

Gamemasters may wish to have the invitations arrive only a day before the meeting (or -- horrors! -- the day of) to heighten the tension. This is fine, but doing so may make it difficult to maintain that pace while building the hazy, indistinct environment or prevent the players from building relations between their characters.

Together Again for the First Time

On the night of the reunion, the concierge will escort the characters (individually, as a group, or in whatever order the characters arrive and ask to be let in) to Roland's room. Although the Wilkinson has an elevator, the concierge leads characters up the stairs. The trip of several flights should give the characters a sense of *déjà vu*, as though the stairs they just climbed were exactly like the ones they're climbing now. Even the inconsequential details they (actively, remember) observe reoccur -- that smudge on the wall is in the exact same place a similar smudge was on the last flight. Finally, they're let out onto an indeterminate floor (even those who have said that they're counting can't be sure; is this the twelfth floor? The tenth? The eighth?) and shown to apartment F.

Knocks are met with silence, or with other unidentifiable and muffled sounds from elsewhere. Unless the characters let themselves in, they may well wait forever.

Roland's apartment is a curious little place, consisting of only a single, unremarkable room. The walls are a pea green and the sole window, streaked with rain, opens to face a brick wall next door. (That's strange -- no one remembers the next building being so close.) No bathroom is evident. (Maybe this hotel is so old the whole floor shares one?) The only objects in the room are an obviously valuable cherry-wood chair upholstered in a pale blue that continues to fade in the yellow light (but the room has no lamps -- how is it lit?) and a cherry-wood roll-top desk that was obviously built by the same craftsman, perhaps even as part of the same set. Those examining the desk are unable to open drawers or retract the top; they feel as if they're part of the bulk of the thing itself rather than moving parts of it. Anyone who sits in the chair feels an intense chill that lingers even after they've moved out of it.

When the characters are all present and preoccupied -- when no one's stating that they're specifically looking the chair - - Roland appears therein, sitting with one leg crossed over the other. Anyone watching the door obviously didn't see

him come in.

Without regard to the strangeness of his arrival, Roland makes introductions to those who still need them. Over the course of these introductions, and through the conversation thereafter, Roland never leaves his chair. He offers no refreshments (no one's hungry or thirsty, anyway . . . even though they can't remember what they had for dinner despite the invitation's instruction to come after dinner) or hospitality, which should seem odd given his formality and obvious distinct breeding.

Roland proceeds to relate a tale for the characters, regarding a death in the family's past. As history would have it, an ancestor who just happens to share a name with one of the characters (the character the gamemaster has selected), died under mysterious circumstances. Roland, while looking through letters concerning the ancestor's will and testament, suspects that the ancestor was murdered. In the interests of the family, won't the characters please investigate? Roland would, but he can't leave the house because his health prevents him.

Roland can be as helpful or as vague as the gamemaster wishes. If the characters seem to grow frustrated with him, feel free to offer a bit of substance -- perhaps Roland can't leave due to palsy, or perhaps he asks them to retrieve a letter concerning the will from the desk (which now works, to the surprise of those who tried it earlier) and allows them to read it. Use whatever suits the characters' temperament.

In the end, Roland confides in the characters the location of the murdered ancestor's home, a converted airplane hangar. Thereafter, Roland's contributions end. Some gamemasters may wish to have him begin to literally repeat himself, verbatim.

Dead Again

At this point, the players will probably send their characters to the hangar. The hangar itself should leave much the same impression, a vague homogeneity of surface and texture.

Inside the dirt-floored hangar rests an old prop plane. Anyone with knowledge of such things may even think it resembles the plane first flown by the Wright brothers -- or perhaps an even *earlier* model, if such a thing existed (did it?). A search of the hangar reveals minor clutter, tools and the like, but nothing that suggests anyone actually lived in here. In the corner, however, the condition of the earth suggests that some digging had been done. The marks indicate something the size of a man may have been buried therein.

Sure enough (now that the characters are looking for it -- don't mention it earlier, even if someone does specifically say they seek it), a shovel is included among the hangar's tools.

As the characters dig, mention to the previously selected player that her character feels a bit disconcerted. As the digging continues, she slowly becomes more and more hazy, her body becoming translucent and finally just short of transparent. As the final scoop of dirt leaves the grave, the character has vanished completely, only to have appeared, entirely intact, in the grave itself. The character, unable to move, lies on her back in the makeshift tomb, with a hideous, livid wound that betrays the removal of her eye.

The gamemaster should allow the characters to discuss the situation for whatever length of time he wishes. He may even choose to allow the "murdered" character to speak (though she probably shouldn't move, at risk of spoiling the effect) after the initial revelation. Before long, however, the gamemaster should fade the scene out . . .

. . . And then open it again as it occurred at the beginning of the story, right down to the splotched ink on the invitation.

Running the Story

A gamemaster running "A Night like Every Other" should consider a few things when he prepares to tell the story and

while it's going on.

- **Read the title:** It's always night, for any character who makes a point of noticing. Even in the "days" that pass, the characters should have no recollection of what occurred in anything other than the immediate present.
- **Keep it blurry:** Don't allow the characters to focus on individual details, except as they become important to the resolution of the story.
- **Whodunit?:** That's not really important, as the tone and mood of the story take precedence over the narrative. Still, some players may want the answer (and you know your players' tastes better than I do). If you anticipate this, feel free to alter the flow of the story so that it implicates someone. For more horrifying (if less bleak) ending, have another character find himself in possession of a bloody awl or knife as the first character's body materializes in the grave.
- **Twist the environment:** Emphasize the repetitious, unreal nature of the characters' immediate surroundings. Was that car there a moment ago? Wait, what car? Did the concierge always have that mustache? Does he exhibit any secondary gender characteristics at all?
- **Always alone:** Surrounding characters, if you choose to use any others, should be kept to a bare minimum. Let the understanding that they may be the only people in whatever world this is slowly crawl across the players and unsettle them.
- **Fire and forget:** This story is designed solely with the purpose of being a one-shot. It would obviously not fit in a campaign of any stripe. Simply close the session as the players realize their characters are about to undergo it all again, and then discuss everyone's experience with it.
- **Be the people:** That's most important! The story is meaningless without the characters that it intends to unnerve. Encourage relationships; wind them into the events.



The Flight of the Azure-Cherry Wood Duff Lifter

by Sean Patrick Fannon

Important Note -- the Game Master should **not** reveal the name of the scenario until after it is completed.

This is a scenario for *very* inexperienced characters. It doesn't really matter how many -- the typical-sized group will do. It can be in pretty much any typical fantasy setting.

For an explanation of the Iron Ref rules and a list of the secret ingredients, please see the [Introduction](#).

The Heroes have just made the dangerous trek down the treacherous, winding path that carries them from the top of the Dreadfall Cliffs to the bottom, where the teacher and friend of one or more of them, Master Izzin, resides in a secluded cottage on the edge of the sea. They are going to pay their respects before they set out on the adventures they are destined for. It takes a full 2 days to navigate the path, but it is an important and proper thing that they do.

Master Izzin is a cantankerous and eccentric old wizard given to strange inventions and alchemical experimentation, and he likes his privacy. However, he is expecting the Heroes and is quite pleased that they are coming.

When they reach the bottom, however, they are attacked! Goblinoids from across the sea have sent an advance scouting party, and they intend to use the treasures found in Izzin's home and the cliff pathway to invade the local territory.

(Use whatever low-level humanoid aggressor is appropriate to the game -- rat-men, goblins, orcs, etc.. Use one per Hero.)

Once the Heroes defeat their attackers, they will note the front door has been bashed in. Normally, Izzin has plenty of magical and mechanical traps to deter such brutish invasions of his privacy, but it is clear that he deactivated them all in preparation for the arrival of his former students and their friends.

Rushing in, the group will be met by two larger opponents, obviously guarding the door. They should make relatively quick work of these brutes.

(Use the next level up of aggressors, such as bigger orcs, bugbears, or the like.)

Izzin's cottage is actually laid out fairly simply. There is the main floor, and then there is a basement. The main floor has 4 rooms -- a Master Bedroom, a Guest Bedroom (given over to bookcase overflow), a Kitchen/Dining Area, and a Library. The basement is one large space that serves as Izzin's laboratory and storage area. More detailed descriptions come later.

The Heroes will find Master Izzin lying in his bed in the Master Bedroom. He has a jeweled, black-tinged dagger embedded in his eye -- a most grievous wound! It is a testament to his will and endurance that he is still alive. Izzin is quite delirious from the pain and is barely able to speak coherently. After a few moments of attention (and a likely attempt at healing, which will make him better after a fashion, but with the dagger remaining in place), he will clear up a bit and be able to say,

"D- . . . Dagger of Leaching. Do not pull . . . it out. Li- . . . little monster wants my mind, which this . . . thing is . . . draining into its . . . hilt. He plans . . . plans to come back . . . and take all there is of me into him. Pull it before it's . . . done . . . and I will . . . die."

Izzin will spasm and seem to fade a moment. Further stirring and aid will rouse him for a moment more.

"More . . . more of them coming . . . from across the sea. Must get up . . . high . . . fast." Izzin's mind is already being made a bit fuzzy by this point. "Get to town . . . priests there can help. Find bl- . . . bl- . . . blue . . . butt . . . "

At this point, Izzin will fade and no amount of help will bring him around. Over time, it will be clear that his health is fading as well. The Heroes must find a way back up the cliff face -- fast!

Time to search the house.

Master Bedroom

A huge, cherry wood four-poster bed, very comfortable.

A dresser-and-mirror combination that, if you concentrate while staring into it, will let you imagine what you would look like dressed in anything at all.

A fine cherry wood chair, upholstered in bright, bright crimson.

A well-crafted seat-and-chamber-pot contraption, behind a privacy screen, that seems to magically eliminate whatever is put into it (possible repository for just about any unwanted thing).

A large cherry wood wardrobe that does not lead to a magical kingdom, but is filled with many fine clothes. Among them are various magical robes -- one that will keep the wearer warm in the cold; one that will keep the wearer cool when it is hot; one that allows the wearer to breathe underwater; one that makes the wearer invisible.

Various and other sundry things appropriate to an old man's bedroom.

Guest Bedroom

A smaller version of the Master Bedroom in all ways, including the very nice chamber pot contraption (though the seat is not so fine). However there are bookcases crammed all along the walls, full of books. Most of these books have been rifled through, tossed onto the bed or floor in scattered piles. This has obviously happened very recently.

(What are the books? Time to get creative, my Game Mastering friend. There will be historical treatises, philosophical dissertations, theological ruminations, and magical and scientific pontifications galore, all relevant to the world you are running this in. However, nothing in these books will necessarily help in this scenario, and the more time is taken searching through them, the more Izzin's life will fade away -- play that up).

Kitchen/Dining Area

Fairly modern idea -- the kitchen is set up just off the dining area, with a pass-through built in. The whole area is fairly trashed. The remains of mostly-eaten food are flung everywhere, and the very nice cherry wood dining room table and chairs are badly scratched and marred, and a couple of the chairs are outright broken. Each chair is upholstered in

almost-florescent peach.

There are a few large knives and other utensils, but nothing that would represent better weapons than the Heroes have.

However, what is here (that will be helpful later) is a very large, very heavy sack of rice.

Library

In addition to the many, many bookcases (and books scattered and flung everywhere), there is an assortment of very nice cherry wood furniture, including four chairs and two benches. The chairs are upholstered in a bright canary yellow, while the benches are done in vibrant emerald.

One of the bookcases has been hacked up and shoved around in such a way as to reveal the passage (once secret) to Izzin's downstairs laboratory.

Basement

Think mad-scientist meets eccentric wizard, and you have it. Lab tables with vials and pouches of powders and small trays to contain tiny fires . . . almost all of which has been smashed up by the current occupants. These would be a goblinoid spellcaster (mage, if appropriate) and three more larger brutes of the variety that was guarding the door.

(The spellcaster should be barely more capable than the best in the Hero party, but he is the one who put the Dagger of Leaching into Izzin's eye, hoping to gain the old man's master of magic. He trashed the basement in frustration, because he can't make heads or tails out of anything he has found, so he thinks it's all useless. No, he hasn't thought far enough ahead to realize that, once he has Izzin's mental gifts, he will then be able to use the stuff . . .)

Hopefully, the battle will go well. Now the Heroes must search for the "blue butt" thing that Izzin mumbled about . . . which, in this case, is a cherry wood chair, upholstered in a bright, metallic blue and, oddly enough, happens to be bolted to the floor for no apparent reason. Additionally, the wood on this chair has a much darker tone than every other piece of furniture in the house.

Amidst the insane amount of odds and ends (add as much flavor as you wish), other things of note and use include: a Stone of Blade Keening (will add a +1 to any blade that it is used to sharpen, as long as it is used once a day); 3 Healing Potions (moderate strength; should be enough to heal the party up); Dust of Weight Reduction (enough to make 6 grown human men weigh 1/4 their normal weight); and a 100 foot length Trick Rope (a rope that will follow simple commands, such as "Wrap around that" or "Grab Tessa's wrist").

Okay, Here's the Trick . . .

The "blue butt" is the blue-upholstered cherry wood chair, which has been treated with a special mixture of Izzin's own creation, a very powerful levitation oil coating the wood of the chair (which is why it is darker). Careful searching of the components on the bench by anyone with any alchemy or related training will reveal the mixture, and some experimentation will reveal what it does.

If the chair is unbolted, it will immediately rise (with great strength, but **not** intense speed) to the ceiling. It will be incredibly difficult to pull down again (an incredible feat of strength, really, or teamwork will be required). Testing will reveal that the force of the chair's levitation will be enough to carry 3 grown humans up the cliff side (and the Dust of Weight Reduction will make it possible to carry even more, especially with creative use of the Trick Rope). The chair will rise slowly enough that it will be possible to grab onto something near the top of the cliff before they all go rising into the atmosphere (which is what will happen if they mess up and don't jump off).

Getting the chair out of the house and positioned at the cliff side will be a neat trick, but this is where the huge bag of rice comes in. Careful apportionment of the rice will balance out the levitation, and make it possible to maneuver the

chair outside.

Obviously, they might think of something else, but that's the best path to succeed in this scenario. If they come up with a better approach, let them -- that's the magic of interactive storytelling.

Storyline Rules for the Star Wars CCG



by Joe Taylor

Art colored by [Keith Johnson](#)

These rules are designed to set up a series of games which will follow, more or less, the progression of the *Star Wars* movie trilogy while still allowing players flexibility in deck design. There is a lot of room to tinker with the rules to fit your taste and several suggestions for optional rules.

1. **Choose sides.** The two players decide who will play the Light and Dark sides and they will keep these alignments for each game.
2. **Decks.** Since the expansions follow the same progression in focus as the story of the movies, play is divided into a series of games where decks made from each expansion face off against each other.

Each player picks 60 cards each from *Premiere* (including *Premium Premiere* cards), *A New Hope*, *Hoth*, *Cloud City* (including *Premium CC* cards), *Dagobah*, *Jabba's Palace* (including *Premium JP* cards), and *Endor* (including any *Preview* cards from the *Death Star* set). Objective cards cannot be used. Each group of cards is to be kept separate; these represent decks you will be playing with -- but it is not your finished deck. You should now have 7 decks of 60 cards each.

3. **Support Deck.** This is a new mechanic for the purpose of the Storyline rules. The *Premiere* set contains many "staple" cards like Stormtroopers, X-Wings, Sense, and Alter that are common throughout the *Star Wars* trilogy. Also, the Special Edition set has cards which enhance all of the expansions and is not meant to "happen" in any sequence with the rest of the sets. Therefore, each player will create one Support Deck made up of 120 cards from the *Premiere* and *Special Edition* sets, as well as Premium cards from *Third Anthology* and the *Official Tournament Sealed Deck*. You'll want to fill this up with any "staple" cards or multiple copies of mains that you'll want later on.

[Storyline Rules for the Star Wars CCG](#)



Using the Support Deck: Before each game, a player may swap up to 15 cards in his deck for an equal number of cards in his Support Deck. The swapped cards then become part of the Support Deck and can be used in a later game.

Example: When it comes time for the *Dagobah* game, the Dark Side player has decided that even though he can use the Bounty Hunters from that set, he'd rather play an asteroids strategy and save the Hunters for *Cloud City*

or *Jabba's Palace* where they'd be more powerful. So he swaps the Bounty Hunters and their ships and weapons for the TIE Fighters and TIE Defenders he has in his Support Deck. Now those Bounty Hunters are in the Support Deck and he'll be able to swap other cards for them next game when he's playing Cloud City.

4. **Games.** Each individual game will be played normally, one at a time, in sequence. First, both players use their *Premiere* decks, then play with their *A New Hope* decks, then *Hoth*, and so on. At the end of each game, the Force Differential is added to the winner's total score. If the Light Side player wins the *Premiere* game by 9 force, he gets 9 points. If he then wins *A New Hope* by 2 force, his total score would then be 11.
5. **Winning and Challenging.** Once all seven games have been played, the player with the higher total score is, tentatively, the winner. However, the player with the lower score may challenge his opponent to a final game using either 60 or 120 cards from their Support Decks. The winner of this ultimate game adds the Force Differential to his score, and if the challenger managed to change his score enough that he has the highest total, he is now the winner. Otherwise, his opponent still wins.

This challenge may be treated as an optional rule but keeping it in ensures that players will think carefully about what they want to end up with in their Support Deck by the end of the game. Plus, the 'last gasp' of the losing player keeps with the spirit of the novels and comics which take place after the trilogy, when the Empire is broken but not defeated.

Storyline Sequence

- I. Both players construct 60-card decks for *Premiere*, *A New Hope*, *Hoth*, *Dagobah*, *Cloud City*, *Jabba's Palace*, and *Endor*.
- II. Players construct a 120-card Support Deck using cards from *Premiere* and *Special Edition*.
- III. Seven games are played in the following sequence (before each game, players may swap up to 15 cards from their decks with cards in their Support Deck):
 1. *Premiere*
 2. *A New Hope*
 3. *Hoth*
 4. *Dagobah*
 5. *Cloud City*
 6. *Jabba's Palace*
 7. *Endor*
- IV. Players total up their score and the loser may challenge opponent to a final game using cards in the Support Deck.

Death Star II: When this expansion comes out, it will be the end of the *SW:CCG* sets which follow the sequence of the movies. As far as these rules go, it can be added as an eighth and final expansion which the players must incorporate into an eighth game occurring after Endor. It seems as though the *Death Star II* and *Endor* expansions are intended to be very inter-related, with the Endor Shield Generator covering the second Death Star. However, the mechanic of the Support Deck should still allow players to swap out Endor cards that can be swapped back into their *Death Star II* decks. No other potential problems are foreseen with the incorporation of *Death Star II* should pose for these rules.

Variants

- **Team Play:** Ideally, you need 7 players on each team -- one for each deck. If the individual games are played sequentially, fewer players are needed since they can play in more than one game. However, two full teams can pair off their players according to the appropriate expansions and play all seven games at once! In either case, each team has only one Support Deck which they must share (it is up to the team to decide how the Support Deck is constructed). If the games are to be played simultaneously, resolve who takes what from the Support Deck first. Cards are still to be swapped in order of expansion: *Premiere* player goes first, followed by *A New Hope*, then *Hoth*, *Dagobah*, *Cloud City*, *Jabba's Palace*, and *Endor*. Otherwise follow the same rules for a two-

player Storyline game. When each game is finished, the winner's score is added to his team's total. The team with the highest total score when all games are finished wins. There is no challenging in team play.

- **Continuity:** In this variant of the two-player rules, at the end of each game, cards which were not lost or placed out of play are kept for the next game! This adds a feeling of continuity to the series of games -- though it also tends to give an advantage to whoever won the previous game, so be warned. Also keep in mind that this will lead to games with unequal force piles.

That said, there are several ways this can be done: 1) Only the cards that were on the table at the end of the game can be used in the next game. Location cards may be left played on the table, all other cards can be left as well or shuffled into the next game's deck. 2) All cards which were not lost or placed out of play -- those on the table, in each player's hand, and remaining in his life force -- are kept for the next game. Again, those on the table can either be left out or shuffled into the next deck, whatever the players decide.

If the players feel that these rules makes things too difficult for a losing player, here are two options to off-set the winner's advantage: 1) Whichever player lost the previous game goes first in the following one. 2) Players may swap cards on the table or in their hand for cards in their lost pile at the end of each game -- the winner still gets an advantage, but the loser is able to retrieve any crucial cards he lost in the last game.

- **Strategic Reserve:** This variant changes the way the Support Deck operates. First, if the players wish to change the number of cards allowed in the Support Deck, they may do so. Second, the players may wish to allow cards from any expansion in the Support Deck (though this is still the only source for Special Edition cards). The Support Deck now functions like a strategic reserve or extra cards which can be depleted. Before each game, instead of swapping cards from their deck with ones in the Support Deck, players may add cards from their Support Deck to their deck. Whether or not they can choose which cards to add, or if there is any limit to the number is up to the players. This can lead to games where one side has a greater number of cards in his life force than the other, but both sides will have access to the same number of cards overall. If the Dark Side player chooses to add 30 cards to his Premiere deck, he'll have that many fewer cards to use later -- and the Light Side may choose to add just as many cards to his deck in the next game.



by **P.D. Magnus**

Art by **Phil Foglio**

If you've played *Before I Kill You, Mr. Bond . . .* ([Cheapass Games](#)), you've had the chance to capture spies, to mock them, and -- if you were lucky-- to kill them. The game's simple play is one of its charms. There are only three kinds of cards: Spies, Lairs in which to capture Spies, and Doublers with which to taunt them.

Of course, the charms of simple play can wear thin. Once you've built your hundredth Pyramid of Power, introduced the thousandth spy to your overworked business associate Mister Lo, and had it all torn down by Mr. Fazz more times than you care to count, being a super villain may lose just a bit of its sparkle.

What do other criminal masterminds do to keep their lives interesting? They get embroiled in Subplots. Now, so can you.

Making the Cards

Subplots are a new kind of card in addition to the familiar Spies, Lairs, and Doublers. There are eighteen of these new cards in all. They are provided as a PDF [Subplots PDF File \[30K\]](#) file, which you can read and print out from Adobe's Acrobat Reader. If you don't have Acrobat, you can get it [for free](#).

Each Subplot card is the size of a normal *Mr. Bond* card, so nine of them fit on one page. Although you can print them off on paper, they're easier to use if you print them on card stock. If you can't print directly to card stock, you can photocopy them to cardstock at your local copy center or paste them to cardstock before cutting them out.

If you print them onto white cardstock, you will be able to tell them apart from Lair cards and Doublers. If you're especially concerned, I suppose you could photocopy the card backs from the *Mr. Bond* game and print the Subplot cards onto yellow cardstock. This isn't at all necessary, however. Although other players will know if you have any Subplot cards in your hand, they won't be able to tell which ones you have until you play them.

In any case, you'll have to print out the cards. You'll also need the *Mr. Bond* game.

Using the Cards

Shuffle the Subplot cards into the deck at the beginning of the game. When you draw a Subplot card, you can play it for a particular effect. When you can play the card and what it does are indicated on the card. After being played, Subplot cards are put on the discard pile.

Subplot cards add another dimension to the game by giving you new tactical options. Watch for combinations, like the

powerful Steroid and Triple Espresso double-punch. Don't let the power go to your head, though. The uncanny Mr. Fazz can still destroy your Secret Laboratory.

The Subplots

The PDF file contains the cards in nicely-formatted card shapes, but for your convenience the text of the cards is given below. Some cards can only be played on other villains, some only on yourself. Where a card says 'someone' or 'a player,' you can play the card on either yourself or an opponent.

Closed for Renovations

Move one card of your choice from a player's lair to their hand.

Play when a spy or team is played into the player's lair but before any Doublers are played.

Commando Raid



Send a spy to destroy a single lair card in another player's lair. If the lair card isn't of lesser value than the spy, the spy may still be captured.

Play when you play a spy or team.

He Stopped To Ask For Directions

A spy played into another player's lair moves to yours instead of being captured or escaping. If a team was played, you may only move one spy.

Play when someone plays a spy or team into another player's lair.

Larceny

Move a lair card from another player's lair into your own.

Play instead of playing a Lair card.

Pansy Taunt

Doublers only multiply the value of this spy. One Doubler doubles the value, but two Doublers multiply the value by three, three multiply the value by four, and so on.

Play when an opponent is taunting a spy.

Petty Larceny

Pick a card from an opponent's hand and put it in your own.

Play at any time.

Property Tax

Every player must discard one card of their choice from their hand for each card in their lair, upto their entire hand. You discard first, then taxation proceeds clockwise around the table. The normal turn sequence resumes after taxes have been paid.

Play at any time.

Scavenged Resources

Take a card as it is being moved to the discard pile and put it in your hand.

Play any time cards are discarded.

Secret Room

One Lair card in your lair is saved from the destructive force of a spy or spy team.

Play when a spy or team escapes from you lair.

Sedatives

A spy is treated as having a value three less than their normal value. A spy with a value of zero or less is worth no points.

Play when a spy or team is played into someone's lair but before any Doublers are played.

Steroids

A spy is treated as having a value three higher than their normal value.

Play when a spy or team is played into someone's lair but before any Doublers are played.

System Reset

Discard your hand and draw a new hand of five cards.

Play instead of drawing a card on your turn.

Team-Building Exercise

Play a team of spies into another player's lair from either the top of the deck or another player's hand.

Play instead of playing a spy in the normal way.

Temptation

Force an opponent to play as many Doublers as they can. If they don't have any Doublers, they get frustrated and release the spy who leaves without destroying their lair.

Play when the opponent captures a spy or team.

Thirst for Blood

Force an opponent to kill a spy without playing any further Doublers.

Play when the opponent has captured a spy or team.

This Reminds Me of Work

Swap hands (but not lairs) with another player.

Play at any time.

Triple Espresso

Each 1 point Lair card in your lair counts for 3 against this spy only.

Play when a spy or team of spies is played into your lair.

Wrong Turn

Move a spy played into your lair to the lair of another player. If a team was played, you may only move one spy.

Play when a spy or team is played into your lair.

Iron Weirdness

"Five years ago, a man's fantasy became reality in a forum never seen before -- a giant cooking arena, Kitchen Stadium. The motivation for spending his fortune to create Kitchen Stadium was to encounter new original cuisines, which could be called true artistic creations. To realize his dream, he first secretly started selecting the top chefs of various styles of cooking. And he named his men the Iron Chefs -- the invincible men of culinary skill . . . Kitchen Stadium is the arena where Iron Chefs await the challenges of master chefs from around the world. Both the Iron Chef and challenger have one hour to tackle the theme ingredient of the day. Using all their senses, skills, and creativity, they're to prepare artistic dishes never tasted before. And if ever a challenger wins over the Iron Chef, he or she will gain the people's ovation and fame forever."

-- opening narration, *Iron Chef* (international version)

If memory serves me right, this issue of *Pyramid* has something of an *Iron Chef* feel to it already. For those who had hoped to find solace from that culinary storm in this column, then, my apologies. Food is already deeply intertwined with gaming, from the Doritos and pizza on the table to the ubiquitous iron rations and meetings in taverns to the, er, special menu needs of many fantasy and horror creations. But oddly, for something so central to daily life, to existence, to pleasure itself, food doesn't often take center stage in our RPG adventuring or in our little corner of "fan media." The latter changed with the debut of *Iron Chef* on American cable TV; for the former, I humbly offer this *Iron Chef*-inspired campaign concoction.

First, a quick summary for the uninitiated. Fuji TV in Japan aired the *Iron Chef* program between October 1993 and September 1999; since July of 1999, it's been in syndication on cable television's Food Network. The opening narration quoted above gives the basic setup; the Iron Chef takes on challengers (some of whom represent ominous "factions" of Japanese cuisine rather reminiscent of martial arts schools, complete with feared masters and devout pupils) in the enormous Kitchen Stadium. As the chefs prepare their dishes, breathless play-by-play commentary fills in the audience on the ingredients and the battle's emotional swings. Guests (sometimes the master of a competitor, other times family or fellow chefs from a competitor's school) watch from the Royal Box; a panel of judges then tastes the two chefs' dishes, all of which must include the theme ingredient. (For more details, see www.ironchef.com.) The theme ingredients are typically the finest, most expensive and luxurious versions available -- the potatoes for a "potato battle" are special breeds grown only in one Japanese prefecture and picked under a new moon. No, really. Kitchen Stadium is also fully-stocked with the most recondite sauces, spices, meat, vegetables, and other ingredients available -- \$8 million worth over six years. All of this happens, in the show's mythology, at the behest of the mysterious, wealthy, eccentric, and gaudily-caparisoned "Chairman of Kitchen Academy," Kaga Takeshi.

"Show me what you eat, and I'll tell you what you are."

-- Anthelme Brillat-Savarin

Perhaps it's just me, but I delight in chewing over the mysteries and enigmas surrounding Chairman Kaga and Kitchen Stadium. Why on Earth did he have to *secretly* select the top chefs from various styles of cooking? And if it's so secret, why is it on television? For what monarch, really, is the Royal Box intended? Why do members of the Japanese parliament and famous fortunetellers judge his cooking competitions? Does that yellow pepper contain a human soul, or give the knowledge of good and evil? Why can the wisdom of Chairman Kaga only be contained in subtitles? And what's the deal with his brocaded jackets?

Possibly overstimulated by the jackets, I propose the following five explanations, none of which necessarily fit the facts, but all of which are more than suitable setups for culinary gaming adventure. Many of them assume that the *real* Kitchen Stadium and the *true* competitions happen out of sight; possibly in a subterranean complex powered by a tamed volcano. Some of these explanations can even be combined with one another, for a perfected dish of unique boldness.

- **No, Mister Bond, I Expect You To Cook:** Chairman Kaga is a Bond villain, or a 1960s-era Batman villain. He commits brilliant food-related crimes, or his plan for world domination involves controlling global agriculture. Kitchen Stadium is a monument to his madness.

- **Everybody Comes To Kaga's:** Rather than risk another global conflagration, the conspiracies now conduct their Secret Wars through a combination of potlatch (by cooking and eating incredibly powerful and expensive ingredients, they boast of their resources) and cook-off. Around the fringes, shadowy deals are cut.
- **Uplift Stadium:** The Chairman has been elsewhere; perhaps he was an alien abductee, or he's crossed over from a parallel Earth. (My personal theory is that Kitchen Stadium is a nexus into the Godzillaverse.) Now, he's desperately trying to raise our level of food preparation before They get here; he knows that if They deem human cuisine acceptable, Earth will be granted "civilized" status. Why should membership in the Galactic Federation depend on our space drive capacity?
- **To Encounter New Original Cuisines:** Chairman Kaga is a wealthy, and incredibly bored, immortal. Only through new and exciting food can he retain any connection to his existence. Hey, if [Jesus could be Japanese](#), so could [the Wandering Jew](#). For a magical version of this, the Chairman uses the Stadium as a cover for his sorcerous food experiments in culinary alchemy; with recondite ingredients, he has been building his power for generations.
- **Burnt Offerings:** Or let's go "one louder" on this: he's a god, or the high priest of a god, sustained by the esoteric smells of cooking food. Is the Chairman attempting to placate the deity -- or invoke it?

"When we call corn Ceres and wine Bacchus, we use a common figure of speech; but do you imagine that anyone is so insane as to believe that the thing he feeds on is a god?"

-- Cicero

With all that in mind, here's a campaign frame inspired by what you might call the Secret Mythology of *Iron Chef*. The PCs work for the Chairman, whose motives remain unknown. The true competitions occur in the secret, even more amazing, Kitchen Stadium buried in the bedrock beneath Tokyo. For his endless stream of culinary battles, the Chairman demands only the finest, most recondite and downright peculiar ingredients available. For this, he depends on the Iron Victuallers -- the PCs. Their mission, to go out into the world and hunt down these ingredients; the Chairman provides limitless funding and top-of-the-line refrigerated Black Helicopters. The Iron Victuallers -- skilled in all forms of infiltration, covert operations, and cuisine -- deploy from the Pantry, their superscientific gourmet HQ. Their competition (in addition to the obstacles before any given ingredient) can be other exotic provisioners working for other crazed gourmards, a gray global killjoy group like UNFIT (the UN Food Insipidity Taskforce), evil agribusinesses, or a rival Illuminati group in an "Everyone Comes to Kaga's" world. Although this is basically a cinematic (not to say campy) food-centered variation on a *GURPS Warehouse 23* campaign, it could be flavored with *GURPS Atomic Horror*, *GURPS Cliffhangers*, or even *GURPS Black Ops*, depending on the GM mood.

Unless the PCs investigate and expose the secret motives or nature of the Chairman, there's not a lot of space for evolution and climactic drama in an Iron Victualler campaign. Therefore, keeping player (and GM) interest will depend on maintaining variety in the scenarios. (This, of course, can also make Iron Victualler games great "one-shots" when some key player can't make it to the regular game.) To that end, unless you have a really swell ingredient that you want to build a game around (Odin's mead, [Dionysos' wine](#), mandrake plants), it might be easier to work it from the other direction: decide the theme ingredient based on the scenario.

The "travelogue" approach is one way to do it: pick some place cool and dangerous that the Iron Victuallers haven't yet gone and find out its key foodstuff. Whether you send them to [the Amazon basin](#) for the rare Sapphire Mango, or deep beneath the Bermuda Triangle for kraken, or to Tibet for yeti butter, getting there is half the fun. Sometimes just finding "there" is the challenge. If the Chairman demands coffee beans picked from bushes outside [Irem](#) and roasted over the Fiery Furnace of Babylon, or pure, natural lemonade from the springs of the [Big Rock Candy Mountain](#), or paprika from the dreams of a Hungarian poet, the scenario may center around finding the worm-eaten old map or [eccentric wanderer](#) with the necessary directions. If the Pantry has access to a time machine, you can expand their horizons temporally; send them after fresh hadrosaurus, or aurochs from Attila's prize herds, or [Coca-Cola](#) from Pemberton's first kettle-full, or wine from the wedding feast at Cana.

Another approach is to design the theme ingredient around the opposition, someone or something the PCs haven't fought before -- or a foe they lost to, and desperately crave a rematch with. This can be a simple "monster hunt" (dragon ribs, milk-fed [manticore](#) veal, [griffin](#) eggs, swamp elemental salad) or it can be something guarded by formidable and distinctive opposition. What kind of wine does the Sasquatch crush out of Oregon pinot grapes with

those big feet? Do [Black Dragon Society](#) ninjas guard a pool of immortal koi somewhere in the Ryukyu Islands? In what isolated greenhouse do the Adepts of Hermes raise the Pomegranates of Persephone that allow speech with the dead?

Finally, the nature of the scenario may dictate the opposition, or the theme ingredient, or both. A taut, *Mission: Impossible* "caper scenario" may be just the thing for breaking into Hangar 18 to steal the Roswell Saucer's food locker. A gun-toting rumble will surely help the PCs liberate mammoth steaks or Hyperborean saffron from a Russian mafia larder. For games of intrigue and interpersonal roleplaying, nothing could be finer than the decennial *Prieuré de Sion* wine auction, unless it's the Arcadia County Fair somewhere in the Midwest where the faerie farmers all compete to grow the most impressive and magical vegetables. Looking in books of food history, or reading novels like Michaela Roessner's Renaissance-kitchen-fantasies *The Stars Dispose* and *The Stars Compel* or Tim Powers' secret histories of beer (*The Drawing of the Dark*) and wine (*Earthquake Weather*), can spark yet further ideas. How will the PCs acquire the ingredients for Chairman Kaga's desperate recipes? And how will their opponents -- be they the Iron Chef Aztec or the Antarctic Space Nazi Brewmasters -- fight back? The heat -- will be on!

Pyramid Review

Big Eyes, Small Mouth GM's Screen (for BESM 2nd Ed.)



Published by [Guardians of Order](#)

Screen Cover Art by Julie Dillon and Screen Design by Jeff Mackintosh

Supplement Written by Jesse Scoble

48 pages (adventure book) & screen; \$12.95

Since its release last year, Guardians of Order hasn't exactly been the quickest to provide us with new material for use with the second edition of their exciting anime genre game, *Big Eyes, Small Mouth*. However, they have finally made a little bit of leadway, and there are even a few books for it on the horizon. The GM's screen is one of the first of this forthcoming material to hit the shelves, and while GM screens are seldom items to jump up and down about, this one bears some flaws that make it less useful than usual.

The screen itself is a four-part fold out, with the same digest-sized dimensions as the other books in the line (when folded). It is adorned with yet another graceful cover by artist Julie Dillon, whose art for the *BESM* line captures that anime flair and appeal just right with each piece. The interior is done in a layout similar to that of the core book, but in black-and-white. The tables included on the chart include the action modifiers charts, the degrees of success chart, the weapons chart, and others.

Now, one thing you may be wondering here is, do we really need a GM screen for this game? I mean, this *is* the Tri-Stat system we're talking about here. And if you know anything about this system, then you know that it is notoriously simple -- probably the last game system one would need to have a bunch of charts out in the open to run. And after taking a good hard look at the screen, the truth is that the charts are only mildly handy. Probably the most useful are the attack roll modifiers and the weapons chart, but they hardly constitute the majority.

The screen's lack of utility is further compounded by the smaller size. Because it is a digest-sized screen (height-wise) it isn't going to provide as effective coverage for concealing dice rolls as other, full-sized screens. This isn't to say that the screen will be useless in this regard, but some GMs are certainly going to just keep using one of their older screens from a different system. Thus, the *BESM* GM's screen is a little bit more of a GM "woobie" than a necessary tool.

However, as is done with just about all GM screens these days, this one comes with an adventure book to make it a little bit more worth the money. The adventure is called "So, We Have. . . an Obelisk," and it's written by Jesse Scoble. It is set in a cross-genre setting, allowing players to use just about any character they like, and allowing GMs a lot of freedom when running the game. The basic premise behind the adventure is that a company from Earth, AmeriCorp, has managed to take over the majority of the known universe through the control and manipulation of these titanic obelisks, capable of all kinds of neat things, from folding space to destroying and recreating worlds. The PCs are all Guardians of Order (neat, huh?) -- those individuals marked with a tattoo of Balance and capable of manipulating these mammoth obelisks.

The adventure is divided into two parts. In the first the players are thrust into a world being harvested by AmeriCorp through one of the obelisks, and they must do something or watch it perish. In the second part, the players are whisked away to none other than the AmeriCorp intergalactic center of operations, where they are promptly fallen upon by AmeriCorp agents who want to convert them to their cause and use the PCs' rare ability to manipulate the obelisks to

AmeriCorp's advantage.

The adventure is open-ended that it almost doesn't resemble an adventure so much as it does an extended adventure seed. The world setting is set up, its relevant history is explained in fair detail, and important NPCs are introduced with full stats and illustrations, but the adventure doesn't really demand the GM to take it in any particular direction. It goes over all of the possibilities and suggests a lot of things that GMs might want to do, but ultimately it's up to the individual what shape this adventure (or potential campaign) takes.

Given that there wasn't an intro adventure in the ***BESM 2nd Edition*** core book, this adventure sort of assumes the responsibility of an intro adventure, especially since it comes with the GM screen. This is not an easy thing to do with such a universal game system, but this one does a fair job of it. As it is set up in the adventure, everything is simple and straightforward enough that no GM should get lost trying to run it, and its cross-genre approach allows players to make full use of the character creation options in the core book. However, more experienced GMs are going to find it somewhat lacking due to its relative simplicity, and any GM who wants to get a lot out of it is going to have to do some additional work, especially in the second part.

Given the moderate usefulness of the two items in this combo, we'd have to say that this is only really a good buy for the true beginner or the truly hard core ***BESM*** GM (the mad otaku, who just won't run his ***BESM*** game with anything *but* a GM screen made for the job). Anyone else will probably manage to get by okay without this one.

-- *Jon Thompson*

Pyramid Pick

Aberrant Players Guide

Published by [White Wolf Publishing, Inc.](#)



Written by Andrew Bates, Bruce Baugh, Deird're Brooks, John Chambers, Chris Haddad, and Steve Kenson

192 pages; \$25.95

White Wolf's game of superhuman conflict often asks, "What would you do with the power of a god?" The main book, however, doesn't really fully address that question.

The *Aberrant Players Guide*, on the other hand, does -- and the answer is far more than merely "anything you want to." This supplement, which answers a great many questions about White Wolf's Aeon Society universe, is the ultimate tool kit for a player *or* Storyteller (despite the name) who wants to explore or expand the possibilities of being more than human.

Despite the usual White Wolf tendency to include large amounts of in-character fiction and graphics, the guide is packed from cover to cover with useful ideas, new abilities, new ways of looking at old abilities, ways to tinker with the system, and meatier sections on organizations that had only been hinted at before.

As promised, the new powers range from the merely impressive, such as Psychic Link, to the literally godlike, in the case of Universe Creation. All are well-detailed, and the virtual omnipotence available at the highest levels is reserved for novas with power levels well beyond those of starting characters. The experience cost for such abilities is also staggering, which should allow Storytellers to keep them away from power gamers for the length of any reasonable campaign.

The less overwhelming abilities are reasonably play balanced. A host of new methods is now available for altering powers, increasing or decreasing their effectiveness through the setting's unique characteristics. Also, Merits and Flaws -- the Advantages and Disadvantages of the Storyteller system -- return, as they always do in White Wolf's player guides.

In a strange but welcome twist, the rules for creating naturally-occurring psychics are also provided. Primarily a mystery from the *Trinity* game, the psychomorphs or "psiads" are worked into the setting quite effectively all the same. Though far more limited than novas -- the more polite term for the supers of the *Aberrant* universe -- psiads have a number of abilities that allow them to hold their own in a world of gods, and fascinating potential for a quiet campaign woven in the shadows of the Nova Age.

Finally, the long-awaited super-gadgeteering rules make their appearance. Despite a sidebar to the contrary, you *can* be Iron Man using these rules. It just won't be easy. Nova gadgets are basically devices that mimic quantum powers, but the inventor either has to have the power to be included or be able to observe the power in action, so time machines and Ultimate Nullifiers won't be showing up in most novas' labs any time soon.

More impressive, however, is the way in which all these abilities are presented. Nearly every new ability, and many old ones, are presented with story hooks to make a character more interesting or turn an NPC into a ready-made adventure. The ability to merge with a computer system turns a nova into a literal ghost in the machine. A single turn

of phrase by a manipulative nova can be an assassination attempt -- and an entire adventure. A minor aberration like "androgynous" can be an evening's entertainment as a love-struck character accidentally pursues someone of a gender they don't normally prefer.

Perhaps the best example of this is the section of the book in which the Backgrounds are revisited. Short fictional pieces -- several of which advance the story line -- are followed by how these minor abilities can shape or be shaped by the character. Nothing new to experienced roleplayers, perhaps, but still welcome when well done. Perhaps the most amusing anecdote in the book is a sequence in which a distressed damsel is rescued by her slinky dress -- which happens to be a symbiotic, mobile "eufiber" suit. Spandex, eat your heart out.

Amidst all of this expansion of the game mechanics is also an expansion of the setting. The reader is introduced to no less than three regional super-teams, each with its own feel. (And once again proving that the *Aberrant* designers don't take themselves too seriously, one is nicknamed by its rivals the "Swedish Nova Bikini Team.") A closer look at home town heroes, nova special-interest groups, and the "young heroes" expansion of the world's premier super-team round out the list of modern groups receiving special focus. All are at least interesting, and offer various ways of embroiling characters in local problems.

One of the most interesting revelations in the book is the partial revelation of the origins of the Aeon Society and the motives of its founder, Maxwell Mercer. The Grand Old Man of the setting still has a few aces up his sleeve, and while it remains to be seen what he intends to do with them, they can make life interesting no matter what faction a given campaign focuses on.

The art, as is typical for White Wolf, tends towards the excellent, with a few pieces being less impressive. (The sweet granny lifting the car was priceless, though.) Ranging from the beautiful to the bizarre, it's about what one can expect from White Wolf in general and *Aberrant* in particular.

What really holds the book together, and for that matter what makes *Aberrant* in general so much fun, is the style. The *Aberrant Players Guide* is practically glowing with it, from fun with code names to exploring the final frontier as a hobby. This style, however, is perhaps the book's one weakness as well. Though the creators stress the unlimited possibilities of the setting, there seems to be a certain disdain for four-color heroics. The entire introduction is devoted to pushing campaigns centered on something, *anything*, other than heroes in costumes. The gadgeteering rules are quirky, and meant to avoid gadget-centered heroes, and adventure seeds focused on the rival "hero teams" of the world are decidedly unheroic for the most part. While *Aberrant* was never meant to be a traditional super hero world, elements of the genre are unquestionably in evidence, and the game's schizophrenia isn't helped any by the contradictions perpetuated in the guide. Also, the back cover blurb promises the "full skinny on the N! Network," something I didn't notice in the book myself.

And of course, White Wolf can't leave well enough alone. Having revealed the truth behind one major power type, the psychics, they hint at a *third* type of empowered beings, something they call "paramorphs." All we get is a name. We'll probably find out a little more about them in the coming pulp-era game . . .

Aside from thematic confusion and a few typos, however, the *Aberrant Players Guide* is an indispensable tool for budding novas and Storytellers alike, with something to offer any campaign set in the Nova Age. Indeed, many other campaigns with powers beyond those of mere mortals might benefit from this book.

So, what *will* you do with the power of a god?

-- Peter Flanagan

Pyramid Pick

The Speaker in Dreams (for D&D)

Written by James Wyatt



Published by [Wizards of the Coast](#)

32 b & w pages + 10 pages of "Web Enhancement;" \$9.95

(SPOILER ALERT: If you plan on playing in this adventure, you probably don't want to read this review.)

The Speaker in Dreams is an adventure for four 5th level characters. Like the *Sunless Citadel* and *The Forge of Fury*, this is one of the core adventures that is supposed to be kept in print. Unlike those two though, this isn't solely a site-based encounter. That's right, there's more than just running around the dungeon this time. Taking place in the city of Brindinford, the characters get to match arms against wererats and wits with a player's most dangerous foe: NPCs.

The adventure starts off with an introduction that gives a one sentence recap of what the adventure is about, how many characters are needed, what level the characters should advance to by its conclusion, and notes on why the adventure has encounters a bit more difficult than earlier adventures. The adventure background and synopsis allow a GM to read it over briefly and know why the events are taking place. The section on character hooks enables the GM to get the players involved. Because Brindinford isn't just a hamlet, the city is broken up into neighborhoods, each with a different style and information. The Ford North is the wealthier holy quarter, while the Southspur is the poor area. Text that is to be read aloud is in a gray background, while additional information, such as what area effect spells can do in the city streets, are boxed off from the main text to the side of the page.

Broken up into two main sections, Events and Encounters One and Two, the party is led to believe one thing, and then learns that not everything is as it seems. Because it's not a dungeon crawl and may be the first time players are involved in a 3rd Edition adventure that isn't one, the GM should keep the players on their toes. New players may be unfamiliar with the main antagonist, a mind flayer, and have no idea how to fight other adventurers.

Because it uses events to get characters involved, there is an adventure flow chart. This allows a new GM to quickly glance at the chart now and again and see where his party currently is. The interior covers include a Manor House, two temples, a maze of alleys, a bell tower, and an overview map of Brindinford itself. Unlike the smaller villages of earlier adventures, Brindinford has more detail given to it. Like previous adventures in the core adventures, *The Speaker in Dreams* has a tight layout, uses interior covers, and doesn't waste a lot of space with strange, ungainly fonts. There are only three pages that could have been done better: 17, 25, and 26 (the last two could have been combined into one page if the illustration was taken out). Maps are well done and easy to read, and art goes along with the text and is of high quality.

One of the best things about adventure is the Web Enhancement of the product. A section titled "All Around The Town" adds ten pages to the adventure for the hefty cost of nothing. Stored as a PDF document, I had no problem opening and printing the adventure supplement. It has the same fonts, design, and layout as the adventure. More impressive is this isn't just a piece of fluff, but is written by the same author and gives a lot more details to the city of Brindinford. There are new NPCs, adventure hooks, and monsters to throw at the players. While Wizards has used Web Enhancement for a few products before, this is the first time so much useful material has been added. Wizards of the Coast does a nice job of breaking away from the dungeon hack style of game play with this adventure and the extra Web Enhancement gives the GM something that players might not have access to right away. If Wizards can keep up this level of quality and add-ons, the bar for *d20* products has just been raised.

Reviewer's Note: The Wizards of the Coast web site is unfortunately, not as nicely done as this adventure. Those wishing to add the Web Enhancements to their adventure, go here: <http://www.wizards.com/dnd/article.aspx=dnd/we/we20010105a>

-- *Joe G. Kushner*



Three competitors. Three minds of the roleplaying world, each representing a different gaming genre, have accepted the Iron Ref challenge.

Three secret ingredients. Selected by a special guest, three ingredients -- plot elements, story pieces, or other oddities -- are selected for the challengers to incorporate into their concoctions.

2000 words. Each competitor has two thousand words -- and no more -- to devise a generic scenario in their genre incorporating all three secret ingredients.

24 hours. And they have one day to work their magic.

Who shall emerge, victorious, as the Iron Ref?

* * *

Our challengers, and their respective genres, are:

James L. Cambias, writer of such diverse items as *Six Guns and Sorcery*, (for *Castle Falkenstein*), *Fall of the Malakim* (for *In Nomine*), and *GURPS Planet Krishna*, will be representing the **Science Fiction** genre.

Justin Achilli, line developer and contributor for [White Wolf's Vampire: The Masquerade](#) line (plus contributor to *Kindred of the East*, *Clanbook: Cappadocian*, and the *Werewolf Players Guide Second Edition*) will be representing the **Horror** genre.

Sean Patrick Fannon, leader of the [Shards of the Stone](#) project, creator of the *The Fantasy Roleplaying Gamer's Bible*, and writer for *Champions*, *Shatterzone*, and WEG's *Star Wars RPG*, will be representing the **Fantasy** genre.

* * *

The secret ingredients have been painstakingly corralled by none other than **Kenneth Hite**, brainchild behind [Suppressed Transmission](#), and creator of more roleplaying material than we can shake a stick at. And, really, who's better at supplying secret ingredients than our own master of arcane lore?

Stop reading if you don't want to know the secret ingredients!

This competition's secret ingredients are:

- An injury to the eye
- An experimental flying-machine

Fiddly Bits

This first Iron Ref competition was held from midnight on Tuesday, January 30th, through Wednesday the 31st (in other words, all day Wednesday). To the best of our ability, the challengers were kept secret from each other, as was the identity of the guest ingredient supplier. Except for coding and formatting for HTML, Iron Ref entries were not edited.

The order of presentation was determined randomly by [Adam Jury](#) (the creative force behind [The Shadowrun Supplemental](#)) and [Keith Johnson](#), Assistant Webmaster at [Steve Jackson Games](#). They were picked through a very selective process involving being available in the chat rooms at one in the morning.

Extra special thanks go to [Steven Howard](#), who first suggested this idea waaaay back in September in the .newcolumn newsgroup. Extra special thanks also go to [Peter V. Dell'Orto](#), for suggesting the Iron Ref name. And a general round of appreciation to the other folks who inhabited the .newcolumn board for

A cherry-wood chair upholstered in a significant, perhaps even alarming, shade of blue

Without further adieu, then, here are the results of this competition:

SciFi: [Blue Genes](#), by *James L. Cambias*

Horror: [A Night Like Every Other](#), by *Justin Achilli*

Fantasy: [The Flight of the Azure-Cherry Wood Duff](#)

Lifter, by *Sean Patrick Fannon*

offering their thoughts and opinions on this idea. So . . . thanks!

Although designed as a one-shot, if Iron Ref is popular enough, we have no problem making this a recurring feature (although, if we did that, it probably wouldn't be made any more common than bimonthly or so). Commentary on this little experiment is welcome, either by sending us a [note](#), or dropping by the [Pyramid discussion boards](#).

Adah Gregory

A Non-Canonical Character for *In Nomine*

by Kathryn Martens

Art by Dan Smith and colored by Keith Johnson

Book of Genesis

Many gamers are familiar with the basic creation story as presented in the Book of Genesis: God creates the Earth and all things in it in six days; He creates Woman as a mate for Man; the Serpent tempts the Woman into eating the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil; and finally Man and Woman are evicted from the Garden of Eden for their transgression. But among the many interesting things to note about the creation story is the following passage, Genesis 3:22:

"Then the Lord God said, 'Behold, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil; and now, lest he put forth his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever' -- therefore the Lord God sent him forth from the garden of Eden . . . "

In essence, it seems that God Himself feared humanity would reach beyond itself a second time, and aspire to more than they were given. To prevent their overreaching themselves again, He cast them from the garden and set a flaming sword at its entrance to drive them away.

Book of Enoch

Fewer people are familiar with the apocryphal book known as the Book of Enoch. Enoch was the sixth generation after Adam, and by all accounts (in the books of Sirach and the Wisdom of Solomon) was a just and righteous man. He was so righteous, in fact, that he did not die, but rather was assumed bodily into Heaven by God. It is recorded in the Book of Enoch that he was taken to Heaven in a chariot borne on the backs of angels in the form of flaming wheels; it is from this image that the phrase "chariots of fire" was created. (Those who game *In Nomine* will recognize the Wheels by the name "Ophanim," given to them in the first millennium AD by Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagete.) After he was assumed, scribes wrote down his visions and his assumption as an extensive work on spiritual physics and the history of the world since Adam.

What Genesis only hinted at, though, appears in full in the Book of Enoch: the history of the Grigori. The early fathers of the Christian Church culled the Book of Enoch, among others, from the Bible because of its "questionable" theology. (For reference, other questionable books include the Book of Adam and Eve, in which Adam's first wife, Lilith, is described; books in which it is revealed that Jesus had brothers and sisters; and other texts in which strict doctrine is thrown into question.) One of the reasons for Enoch's removal was the Grigori and their history with humanity.

The Grigori

Once God had thrown humanity out of the Garden of Eden, His anger softened a bit. He wished the pinnacle of His creation to succeed in the world, rather than be destroyed by it. Thus, God created a band of angels known as the Grigori. They were more commonly known by their assignment, as the Watchers.

The Watchers were assigned the duty of teaching the newly formed humanity how to live in the world. According to

the Book of Enoch it was the Grigori who passed on all the secrets of civilization to humans. In the beginning, these inventions had the holiest of intentions: the art of building shelter, to protect humanity from the elements; the art of agriculture, to feed them; literacy, to pass on the Word of God. The Grigori adored humanity for their eager minds, and were proud of their quick progress. The Watchers soon became the closest of all the angels to the human race.

Unfortunately, this also meant they were the most fallible. At first the Grigori were revered as mentors. But as the Grigori lived longer and longer among humanity -- and produced greater and more varied inventions for their most adored human charges to indulge in -- the Grigori found themselves in turn adored as gods. Humanity was overreaching itself again, this time with the help of the angels. Both the most grim and the most frivolous Grigori inventors found themselves the object of human adoration: among them were the makers of war machines, and the makers of fineries. Humanity sought the power to take life at their own will, rather than God's; and they sought to create the illusion of youth and beauty long beyond their appointed old age.

The Grigori soon became as debauched as humanity could dream. The Grigori took lovers, husbands and wives from among humanity and produced terrible half-breed children: literal giants, they were known as the Nephilim. They were tremendous in size and terrible in their twisted natures. They terrorized the Earth, and defiled all they touched. Humanity, running rampant with the inventions the Grigori gave them, made war upon each other and indulged in abominations of every sort. Eventually the Almighty could suffer it no longer and cast the Grigori from Heaven. The Nephilim were hunted down by the heavenly host and destroyed. Three generations after Enoch was assumed into Heaven, it is recorded in Genesis that the family of Enoch's grandson, Noah, was chosen as the sole survivor of the Great Flood. God chose to wipe the Earth clean and start over again.

The Game

Most celestials agree that all the Grigori were destroyed in the Flood. Some celestials (the crackpots) believe that a few Grigori may somehow have escaped the wrath of God. However, what angels (and demons) agree on is that the Grigori's half-breed blood still exists in humanity. Their progeny that did not immediately become Nephilim remained largely human; and as it passed through Noah's family down through the generations, it spread thinner and thinner -- but farther and wider -- until the numbers of Grigori half-breeds may well be countless. It is a possibility that these half-breeds may become conscious of their "difference" from the rest of humanity, and may well learn to exert their control over the Symphony somewhat as a celestial might. It is unknown what the reactions of such a being might be to suddenly being exposed -- and manipulated -- as another pawn in the War between Heaven and Hell. But more than anything, it is certain that a Grigori's first priority will always be humanity.

For the purposes of "Supporting Cast," at least one Grigori may still exist. Her name is Adah.

Adah

One of the most prolific of the Grigori, both in invention and in debauchery, Adah was the angel gifted with the knowledge of human adornment. To begin with, adornment was intended as a holy ritual used to express authority. Adah invented a crown as an Earthly imitation of the corona of golden glory that surrounded the Godhead. She invented a priest's staff as a mimic of a shepherd's rod -- but a rod fine enough to shepherd humans. She felt that Man could benefit from such authority because of the order, peace, and prosperity it would bring: order brought about by the awe inspired by impressive adornments. With judicious use, this awe could bring order where none existed.

However, it wasn't long before Adah wished to express more than straight lines and heavy gold. Searching about for more varied forms to inspire her, she discovered that Man in general had a fascination

for one thing that surpassed all others: Woman. Intrigued, she took on Woman's form to study her more closely. She discovered that human women were more delicate of frame, and somehow all the more interesting because of it. Women had more interesting eyes, more graceful curves. Yet some women weren't as beautiful as others; some had squinty eyes, some had bony shoulders. She watched these women fade into the background as more naturally beautiful women entered a social group of humans, and she felt pity for them.

From the humble beginning of a single plait of hair, Adah began the indelible weaving together of love and appearance. Adah created makeup, jewelry, and other forms of adornment in her zeal to make the bodies of human women even more beautiful. Adah wanted every woman to feel loved and loveable, and to leave none unwanted and unwedded. In theory, anyway, she rationalized causing the interdependence of love and appearance in this way: with the aid of these things, human women could increase that most holy of emotions, the love of wedded husbands. By increasing the love within matrimony, Adah could give human women their closest analogy to the love and devotion shown to them by both God and his angels.

Adah began experimenting with her own looks first. She invented hairpins to make her long hair more interesting. She invented kohl for a human friend whose eyes (she felt) were too small. She invented braiding for another lady whose long neck was beautiful, but her hair too plain. She created a crown of wildflowers on a whim -- and made it of gold the next day, and lowered it around her neck. Dresses and earrings, makeup and rings were all her inventions. The ring she took most pride in as humans began to use it to show a promise made to a loved one.

Unfortunately, what Adah created was not the art of self-esteem and happy marriage; what she made was a mirage. Women and men both began to twist themselves into false things with the adornments she created; to obtain the love of someone else, they made promises they couldn't keep, lied with their looks and lied with their lips. The art of self-worth became the art of seduction. As she practiced zealously with her own looks, she began to find *herself* adored, rather than her students. She had suitors by the houseful. And just as suddenly she found that adorning oneself was a ritual of empowerment and sensuality -- of reaching beyond oneself.

It wasn't long before Adah had earned herself a place among the truly fallen Grigori. She neglected her duties of solemn adorning ritual, suffering kings and priests to fall as she concentrated on prostitutes. She had children by numerous men, and each child was more monstrous than the last. She tended them jealously, attempting to make their hideous forms more pleasing to the eye so that they, too, could find love -- whether honestly or through false arts, she didn't care.

But none was more surprised than she when all Grigori were sundered from Heaven by the Almighty. She was condemned to live upon the Earth for the rest of her long life for having debased the newly created humanity. The shock of being stripped of her powers proved too much for her; she wandered for centuries in a daze, pulling her fading trappings of gold and finery about her like a tattered cloak. When the Flood came, she (like the rest of

humanity) was caught unawares; she survived by merest chance, being trapped in a cavern carved by a natural freshwater springs.

When the waters receded, and eventually humanity walked abroad again, she sought out humanity's cities to make her living. She sold off her ornaments to get food, until none were left except her hairpins. Refusing to give them up, she sold herself. Mindless, she did anything she had to -- except giving away the last of her ornaments -- in order to survive. And humanity slowly debased itself again.

But one day, in a dusty desert town in a place called Judaea, Adah stumbled across not only her salvation, but her "fifteen minutes" of fame. She found a crowd gathered outside a house to hear a rabbi speak. Thinking perhaps she might find someone to love her for a price, she investigated. What she found was a young rabbi named Jesus sitting down to dinner with a Pharisee. She noted that no one -- not even the owner of the house -- had bathed the feet of the young rabbi, nor welcomed him with the customary kiss, nor even anointed his head. And she also knew that he had been neglected thus because he lacked the solemnity of the Pharisee's garments, and the costliness of his badges of office. To humanity, grown so accustomed to the fake finery she herself had invented, He looked like a ragged, radical teenager instead of -- gulp! -- who He really was. Stunned and ashamed, she turned from the house and went to the money-changers. She sold her last gold hairpins to buy a sweet ointment, and went back to the house. Knowing that He would never accept adornments such as the Pharisee carried, she offered him the only form of honest love she could: she anointed his feet as the owner of the house should have, and bathed his feet with her contrite tears, and dried them with her own long hair. Adah was forgiven her sins on the spot, but has never since adorned herself. (Readers familiar with the Book of Luke from the New Testament of the Bible will recognize this incident as the story of "the woman who was a sinner," Luke 7:36-50.)

Today

Modern day games will find Adah as a sort of wandering Cupid. Having learned the hard way what really makes any human being beautiful -- devotion and honesty, rather than bells and whistles -- she knows at a glance not only what a person really desires, but also whether or not he should get it. In game terms, Adah can fit easily into three different campaign types: high-powered, standard, and low-powered.

High Power

For high-powered campaigns, in which archangels are as readily accessible as CEOs, Adah can be played as a sort of Jackie Onassis. It was said that Jackie's incredible power lay in the fact that she made every man feel as if he was the only man in the room. Adah has that same ability -- to adorn a man's arm and yet make *him* the center of attention. In such a spotlight, very few people will fail to shine. The thing to remember here, however, is that if you choose to play Adah as a true surviving Grigori, there is no source material on her choir to provide checks and balances on game play. Her powers might well be archangelic in stature, but without guidelines as to her proclivities, Adah could get out of hand quickly. It may be a suggestion to play her as the equivalent of a Role 1 Status 6 character (if such a thing were possible): the tremendous media splash that is suddenly gone after a month. Her chosen splash-mate, however, will be remembered long after she herself has moved on. She has learned to show love and adoration by helping others achieve their dreams -- no frills, no lies, just by encouraging their natural abilities (and helping them along with some truly miraculous "coincidences"). Her appearance will change as often as she changes mates; she takes on the form they would feel proudest to stand next to. For a guide to her powers in general, you might wish to consult the Song list provided below.

Adventure Seed

In a surprise election, a formerly unknown minor city commissioner has rocketed to the position of Governor of the state. Within months of beginning his term, his name is being bandied about as a nominee for Vice President. The PCs' Superior is profoundly worried by this dark horse. His politics seem okay, but his rise was simply too meteoric to be natural. The Superior suspects celestial influence. The PCs are assigned to figure out who is pulling this man's strings,

and for whom. And where did he pick up that bombshell brunette . . . ?

Standard Power

For a more traditionally powered campaign, Adah's effective choir can be Mercurian. The history is unclear as to whether the Grigori were created on the Mercurian model or vice versa; regardless, they each have an indelible love of humanity, and their Resonances would act the same. For this sort of campaign, Adah would be the sort of socialite lady found in *Town & Country Magazine* whose picture was snapped while attending the Vanderbilt family reunion. She might make a living as a matchmaker for these upscale families. She would make marriages that last, but would also have a reputation for discreetly getting rid of libertines or opportunists of either gender.

The thing to remember about giving Adah the characteristics of an angel, however -- even a Mercurian -- is that she is a 5,000 year old angel. She has had no "down time" in Heaven; she has been adventuring with humans since before the Flood, and her abilities should reflect a power level that is quite nearly archangelic. There are two critical levelers here. Firstly, since they were cast out, the Grigori may not enter Heaven or Hell. The Marches are open to her, but Adah might well not wish to take the chance of going there; if her corporeal vessel is destroyed while visiting the Marches, her Forces will be Disbanded. Secondly, since the Grigori have no Words or Superiors, they have no Attunements or Rites.

ADAH GREGORY

Matchmaker, Professional Socialite and Promoter

Corporeal Forces - 5	Strength 8	Agility 12
Ethereal Forces - 5	Intelligence 9	Precision 11
Celestial Forces - 6	Will 12	Perception 12

Skills: Detect Lies/6, Dodge/4, Emote/6, Savoir-Faire/5, Seduction/4 (a holdover from her "younger" days)

Songs: Tongues (Corporeal/4), Empathy (Corporeal/3, Ethereal/5, Celestial/6), Friendship (Corporeal/4, Ethereal/4), Form (Celestial/6), Desire (Celestial/6), Charm (Corporeal/6, Ethereal/3, Celestial/4), Attraction (Ethereal/6, Celestial/4)

Vessel: Human/1 (adult female), Charisma +2

Role: Socialite/6, Status/5

(These are suggested abilities, and are meant as a guideline. Additional skills, knowledges, and other abilities can be added as necessary.)

Adventure Seed

The PCs are invited by name and reputation to a house in the Hamptons. The door is answered by a servant, who shows them to the library. There is Adah, acting as go-between for the distraught family she serves. Their daughter has gone missing, and are trusting Adah to find her before word leaks out to high society. Adah has told the family that their daughter rejected her marriage offer from a young man and has "run off" in protest. The real story: Adah was discovered by a powerful demon who wished to bend her to his service. When she refused, he retaliated by kidnapping the young lady to whom she had been acting as mentor and matchmaker. She needs the PCs' help to find and destroy the demon before he murders the girl (or worse).

Low Power

For an everyday sort of campaign, it may work best to lower Adah to the level of half-breed. Most humans never attain that extra Force required to become a Soldier, but Adah -- like untold thousands of humans -- could have been born with it naturally. A half-breed Adah could well be that "crazy girl down the block" who keeps daring God to show her

an angel.

Adventure Seed

The PCs are on a stakeout. A young girl walks straight up to them and demands to know what they are. (If they're invisible, so much the better!) If the PCs won't answer, or if they attempt to blow her off, she threatens to start screaming. She is homeless and slightly crazed, having run away from home at 13; and until she finds out why she can see what no one else can, she will pursue everyone who seems even slightly more than human (and the PCs fit that bill). The girl shows remarkable resistance to Songs that would normally leave a human flattened on the pavement. Regardless of what happens next -- even if it's a firefight with the people the PCs were staking out! -- the girl never flinches. She will dog the PCs wherever they go until they relent and invite her in, or she will gladly die trying.

Recipe Card for Love Potion Number Pi

by Alice Turow

Art by Phil Foglio and colored by Keith Johnson

Brambles dug past denim into Jody's legs as she forced herself into the clearing. "If my research is right," she thought, "the mezlin blossom should be somewhere near here. Then all I'll need is the sliver of a giant squid's tentacle, and I'll be able to . . ."

Hearing a familiar laugh, she stopped short. "Lou?" she called out to the encampment, where her childhood friend -- but never more -- emerged from a tent. Her heart fluttered wildly, and spiked again when she saw the lone needed blossom in the middle of the campsite. "But . . . what are you doing in Brazil?"

"Well, the company sent me here for research. You know," he said, smiling, "we've got to stop meeting like this."

True Love Potion

This potion will allow the brewer to know the true love of his (or her) heart's desire. Such powers should be treated with the respect it deserves.

2 cups of pure spring water	1 sock from the desired (unwashed)
1 pinch of sand from the nearest beach	A pocket mirror which has glimpsed the smile of the desired
1/4 cup tea tasted by the desired	The year's first strawberry
6 soda crackers	A piece of a fallen star

• • •

1. Heat the spring water to near boiling with the mirror submerged in the pot.
2. Stir the sand into the tea; add to the mixture.

• • •

This four- by six-inch card, labeled "True Love Potion" at the top of one side, has a formula -- or more correctly, a recipe -- for an odd brew handwritten on its front and back. Its ingredients are improbable and challenging, its instructions Byzantine. Its promise? True love. And it delivers . . . somewhat.

Anyone who holds and reads the recipe card, who would like to win the love of another, will find a recipe tailored to that specific person. If followed, the preparer will find himself drawn into events that will bring him into increasingly

improbable encounters with the object of his affections. At the culmination, true love will be known.

Except the preparation portion of the recipe does nothing; it is the gathering of the ingredients that works the *real* power. Each element becomes more difficult to gather, and places the beloved (and pursuer) into more improbable meetings. If there are any feelings to be had between the two, the gathering of these ingredients will make these feelings known, and will enable a relationship to blossom from there.

For example, the card above might work as follows:

- The preparer goes to get water from the nearest spring and finds a piece of jewelry he knows belongs to the beloved, which may (or may not, depending on his courage and situation) give him an opportunity to return it.
- Visiting the nearest beach may coincide with a freak heavy storm, from which the only shelter can be found in a nearby cave . . . a cave currently sheltering the beloved, who is also trapped there.
- An opportunity to acquire tea tasted by the desired occurs when she becomes sick and needs a hot soothing beverage . . . her favorite of which is, of course, tea.

And so on.

By the time of the last ingredient, the two will have had more than enough opportunities, and if there is to be a chance of a relationship between them, it will be so. However, the card does promise *true* love; by the time the last ingredient is acquired, if the beloved does not share those feelings, then that person is compelled by the power of the card to have this be known. If the preparer foolishly tries to create the potion from the amassed ingredients (either despite having won the desired, or because the desired has said no), then a particularly nasty fate will befall the consumer. Possibilities include death by poisoning, falling into a coma where the consumer perpetually lives out a fantasy dream with his beloved, or the annihilation of all feelings towards the beloved (or perhaps even the annihilation of all feelings, period).



How the card works is a mystery. Perhaps it is merely precognitive, and can determine when particularly good times to meet (or learn about) the object of the affections will arise.

Perhaps it actually alters time or fate to bring the two together. More sinisterly, perhaps it controls or possesses the beloved in order to bring that person into contact with the user.

The ingredients offered by the card are often seemingly random. There is generally no correlation between what the brewer knows about the beloved and the ingredients required. (For example, it won't ask for "two scoops of the desired's favorite ice cream," but it might ask for "two scoops of hand-scooped ice cream parlor Rocky Road.") Many times ingredients will require creative interpretations; a "nervous swallow," for example, may refer to a bird or an esophageal movement. Other ingredients may be downright cryptic; what, exactly, is "1 page from a book that hasn't been written" or "1/4 cup child's laughter?" (Sinister GMs may have a specific interpretation in mind; more generous GMs will allow the first reasonable solution to work, and have the beloved be at the appropriate place.)

The pursuer is under no compulsion to continue preparing the recipe, and can quit amassing ingredients at any time. Stopping does not preclude the possibility of a relationship later (either naturally or through use of the card). If he does stop, the ingredients amassed become worthless, and if the card is read again its ingredients will change. The card will only show one recipe at a time; if someone else acquires the card with the intent of wanting to prepare a love potion, it will attune to his recipe . . . making the previous recipe useless. Likewise the recipe card must be possessed to work; photocopying or otherwise duplicating the recipe will prove ineffective.

Adventure Possibilities

Someone becomes enamored with one of the PCs, and acquires the recipe card. The hero suddenly finds himself in increasingly improbable places, meeting the same person in the unlikeliest of situations, and seeing that person spirit off bizarre objects. What's going on? (GMs who use this idea are advised to try keeping the ingredient list secret, so that random elements can be picked out of the PC's actions and pointed to as "correct.")

Alternately, one of the NPCs associated with the party becomes the target for one of these cards. The group may become entangled in whatever insanity brings the brewer and associate together. For added romantic possibilities, the NPC may start developing feelings for the pursuer at the same time the pursuer has second thoughts . . . and an eye towards one of the party.

A movie star hires the party to protect her from a stalker . . . and from her own developing feelings towards that person.

A box of the love recipe cards upends at a crowded place (a mall, a sporting event, a concert). Soon thereafter the city is abuzz with impossible romantic pandemonium. (For more widespread chaos, the powers of the card may be distilled to a website; the global ability to alter people's destinies, in the hands of millions of curious and idle minds, can be a challenge for even the most powerful adventurers.)

And, if the card *is* used with successful results, traditionally this fact is learned afterwards, leading to a complication.

Alternate Ideas

- The recipe card not only works as directed, but it also will work when there is no specific beloved in mind. In this way the card will literally allow "the brewer to know the true love" . . . even if that true love is unknown to the pursuer. If this option is used, it may be recommended that the object of the desire not be revealed until the culmination of the ingredient hunt; other possibilities may come and go throughout the amassing, but the "real" true love of the user won't be revealed until the end.
- For a more sinister version, the card can be maneuvering the user towards malevolent ends. This can be something as simple as a Faustian bargain, where a dark power arrives upon amassing the last ingredient to offer the person's desire. Or it can be more complex, with each ingredient placing more and more of the person's life, soul, or world in danger. ("Well, I barely acquired a child's favorite doll and the stop sign of a major intersection. Time to get the thumb of a political leader.")
- When the card has served its "purpose" (either by uniting two people or proving to them that there is no chance for a relationship), it may disappear, be consumed in fire, or otherwise fade from memory . . . only to appear in the hands of the next person who it finds to be appropriate.
- For that matter, what *is* the card's purpose? Is it altruistic, bringing people closer to their destinies; neutral, being nothing more than a tool, the morality of which is the user's problem; or malevolent, seeking to alter people's lives from their natural courses for more sinister ends? The answer to this may provide other adventure possibilities; to know true love can be a powerful and potentially dangerous thing, and anyone with the ability to orchestrate such events may be truly worrisome.

The love potion is a classic element of fairy tales, stories, and legends; the Recipe Card can be a good way of introducing many elements of these classic elements, while hopefully adding something new to that brew. Such potions are almost always proof of the old adage: "Be careful what you wish for; you just might get it."

Pyramid Review

Monsters of Faerûn (for D&D)

Published by [Wizards of the Coast](#)

Written by James Wyatt and Rob Heinsoo



96 pages; \$21.95

Dungeons and Dragons has long had a tradition of making a lot of *Monster Compendiums*, a showcase of new and exotic monsters to add to the creatures in the *Monster Manual*, for settings from the *Forgotten Realms* to *Dark Sun*. The first *Monster Compendium* made for the Third Edition of *Dungeons and Dragons* continues this old tradition, and does it well.

The first ten pages of the Compendium reiterate the basic organization of the *Monster Manual*; it presents the basic rules for reading and understanding the various entries in the Manual, describing the various elements from Hit Points to Challenge Ratings. This allows *Monsters of Faerûn* to be used as a stand-alone source of monsters, without constantly referring to the *Monster Manual* for detailed information. There is a new element in the descriptive text, however: "In the Realms," which inform the reader how that creature fits into the *Forgotten Realms* setting. This is added separately from the main text of the description, adding world-specific information which spices up the creature, but makes it easier for a Dungeon Master to adapt the creature to any other D20 setting.

The actual monster entries have a large variety of interesting and distinct creatures, from the almost classic Peryton, stag-headed hawklike Beasts who hunt humanoids to devour their hearts, to the more exotic Helmed Horrors, a new class of Constructs who are animated suits of armor with magic weapons and the fighting skills of experienced warriors. Added to the new monsters are some new variations on old creatures, like the Beholder Mage Prestige Class (which is the first official Prestige Class made for a monster), and three examples of Beholderkin, odd creatures which look like evolutionary off-shoots of the original Beholders, created by magical manipulations on Beholder spawn.

There is also the addition of some flavor text which connects many of the creatures in the *Monsters of Faerûn* book together. In the *Forgotten Realms* setting, for example, the Beholderkin were made by another new race of monsters dwelling in the Underdark of the Anauroch desert; the Phaerimm, leech-shaped Aberrations who are all powerful sorcerers. They also hate any and all life that isn't Phaerimm, including the Beholders, which the Beholderkin were made to kill. This little piece of Metaplot, though not vital to the descriptions of the monsters, does make them more interesting to use in *Forgotten Realms*, as well as Hint to the detailed interaction of plots that is to come in the *Forgotten Realms* campaign setting.

Other monster variations of note are a few additional subtypes of Dragons, from the desert-burrowing Brown Dragons to the dark and devious Shadow Dragons. There are also a few new types of Demons, apparently unaligned with the Tanar'ri, some new types of Giants, the new Gem Golems, and six new breeds of Planetouched: the four kinds of Genasi, Elemental-based Planetouched, and two new types of Tieflings: the Fey'ri and the Tanarukk, born from Elves and Orcs respectively.

The Appendix for Templates adds the possibility for even more monsters. There are some new tricks for old Templates like ghosts, lycanthrope, and lichs (including rules for good lichs), and brand new templates, too. The Beasts of Xvim are normal animals and monsters given supernatural powers and cunning by a Dark God. The Curst are humanoids cursed with eternal unlife, unable to die, though not by choice. And the Yuanti in the Realms have started creating Yuanti-Humanoid crossbreeds like the Broodguard and the Tainted Ones.

There are also some new races described in the *Monsters of Faerûn* book, from the now familiar Aarakocra to the new and exotic Dragonkin, a race of dragon-like humanoids. The Dwarven subraces of Faerûn also get an entry to describe the cultural and racial variations common the Realms, from traditional Shield Dwarves to the barbaric Wild Dwarves. Elves don't get such a spotlight, but the complexity of Elven life in the Realms might have made them incompatible with an entry in this Compendium, due to lack of space. Still, other possible races are added instead. The Alaghi beastmen, the froglike Bullywugs and the Wemic lionoid-centaurs all make comebacks from the *Complete Handbook of Humanoids*, along with the Aarakocra. These classic monster races add new roleplaying options, along with other new races, such as the Hybsil, centaurs with the attributes of antelopes rather than horses, and the aquatic humanoid race of the Shalarin.

Overall, *Monsters of Faerûn* seems like a very useful supplement for any campaign of *Dungeons and Dragons 3rd Edition*, and not just for the fans of *Forgotten Realms*. The creatures therein will add interesting details and good adventure opportunities for any fantasy RPG campaigns.

-- *Rolland Therrien*

Pyramid Review

Evil Unlimited (for Brave New World)

Published by [Alderac Entertainment Group](#)



Written by Matt Forbeck

128 pages; \$20.00

Bond movies and superhero games have something in common: they live or die on the coolness of their bad guys. That shared trait highlights the biggest problem with *Evil Unlimited*: it's an interesting supplement, but Evil Unlimited itself is more like the forgettable Max Zorin of *A View to a Kill* than the immortal Ernst Stavro Blofeld.

The premise certainly sounds exciting. In the universe of *Brave New World*, Evil Unlimited is the world's most powerful criminal organization. Its headquarters are in the United States, but they have their fingers in operations all over the world. They'll do almost anything if the price is right . . . theft, blackmail, character assassination . . . but they steer away from murder as "bad for business."

Evil Unlimited provides all the details on this organization, along with six new power packages, gamemaster notes and an adventure. The book is well-organized, and the line's typical "informative website" approach works particularly well in this supplement.

The first third of the book describes itself as Evil Unlimited's "annual report," but it's really a glossy recruiting document. Executive Vice President Nicollette Marks presents a detailed introduction that covers the usual topics for this kind of setting material. We learn about what the company does, where its main offices are, and who the important managers are. Marks also spends quite a bit of time explaining EU's policy of "enlightened self-interest."

The tone is low-key, rational, and if anything a bit earnest. "Sure, we're Evil," Marks seems to say, "but we're not really *evil*." It's a refreshing approach, but it doesn't quite work.

Brave New World is already a comic book world of grays and muddied colors. It is a dystopia, full of tarnished rebel heroes and government stooges. Evil Unlimited fits into this setting, but it doesn't stand out.

That makes the organization Marks presents feel like a missed opportunity. The name "Evil Unlimited" oozes with the potential for over-the-top villainy, begs for an organization that wears its pitch-black hat with a merry sneer. If Forbeck had written EU that way, it would have made an exciting contrast to the morally ambiguous factions that *Brave New World* has already explored.

Of course, as is typical for this game line, Marks isn't always telling the truth. The details are hidden away in the gamemaster's section of the book, but experienced *Brave New World* players won't be surprised to learn that Evil Unlimited's recruiting materials don't tell the whole story.

The gamemaster-only material brings up another problem, though. The additional information doesn't add much interest to Evil Unlimited. The secrets aren't that surprising, and when they are revealed many players will probably just shrug and say, "whatever".

The root of the problem can probably be found in Forbeck's notes for using Evil Unlimited in your campaign. Rather than present a variety of options, he describes one linear storyline that will take a group of player characters from point A to point B. The story he presents is interesting in fact, it's a classic comic book storyline that will never get old but

there's no sign that Evil Unlimited can or should be used for any other purpose.

That's too bad, because the basic organization is sound. There's some interesting characters running the operation, and Forbeck has put a lot of thought into its signature tricks and scams. On the other hand, he has glossed over EU's fundamental goals and purposes. There's a lot about how Evil Unlimited does its business, but there's nothing in the gamemaster section about why it does what it does or what its leaders hope to accomplish. We're left with the motivations described in the player's section, and if we take those at face value many of the secrets in the gamemaster section become irrelevant.

The sample adventure in the book stresses this narrow approach. Again, the premise is interesting. A group of heroes is asked to help bust a delta out of custody as he's being taken to New Alcatraz, but the mission is not what it appears to be and complications quickly develop. The most interesting scenes, however, take place off-stage as the delta the PCs are trying to help confronts the major characters in the scenario. There's no way for the characters to be involved in these scenes they simply hear about them in passing later on.

That's classic bad adventure design, and it tells me that the NPC is the real PC of the adventure. (After all, he's getting all of the really good scenes.) In fact, the way the adventure and the supplement are written suggest that Forbeck is simply reporting his playtesters' approach to the material instead of exploring the different ways that Evil Unlimited can be used in a game.

Evil Unlimited is a respectable supplement, but it never really takes flight. Forbeck seems committed to his particular vision of Evil Unlimited, and that vision is a little too prosaic to inspire a gamemaster into creating great adventures. There are ideas that any superhero gamemaster can use, but this book could have been so much more.

-- *Chris Aylott*

Pyramid Review

Sword and Fist (for D&D)

Published by [Wizards of the Coast](#)



Written by Jason Carl

96 pages; \$19.95

In 1989, TSR came out with a 128 page, \$15.00 book called *The Complete Fighter's Handbook*. It set the stage for kits, and was the prototype for the entire *Complete* series. History repeats itself as the first class support book for third edition, *Sword and Fist*, focuses on Fighters and Monks.

Broken up into five chapters, *Sword and Fist* introduces many new options that can be inserted piecemeal, or all at once. Chapter one, Feats and Skills, has some feats that will sound very familiar to old *Oriental Adventure* fans, like the Eagle Claw Attack or Fists of Iron. For those not interested in old martial arts moves, how about Sharp-Shooting or Zen Archery for that master Bowman? With over thirty new feats, most players should be able to find something they like. The new skill listing however, is much smaller. Six knowledge skills are listed with the areas they cover, but no game benefits. Far more useful are the new uses for old skills that allow you to use Sense Motive for combat prediction or to decipher strategy.

Chapter two, Prestige Classes, is either something you'll hate or love, depending on how you feel about Prestige Classes in the first place. With almost twenty new prestige classes to choose from, the days of being a mere Assassin or Black Guard are over. For those wishing to augment their monks, choose the Drunken Master or the Red Avengers. Those preferring something a little non-standard can pick the mysterious Ghost Walker or Master of Chains. My only disappointment with this section is that the Duelist is reprinted from *Dragon* magazine. There are a wide variety of options here, including Prestige Classes that have role playing limitations, like worshipping a certain god (Fist of Hextor), or being a specific race (like the Halfling Outriders).

Chapter Three, Worldly Matters, gives the GM background on many of the Prestige Classes. The Fists of Hextor, The Knight Protectors of the Great Kingdom, The Ravagers and others are given enough detail that a GM can slip them into a Greyhawk campaign with little modification. Those playing their own campaigns will have to apply the background as they see fit.

Chapter Four, the Game Within The Game, provides more options to players who don't want a prestige class. Looking at different styles of character, like duelist, gladiator, and others, the book examines background details, what ability scores you should have and appropriate skills and feats. For those new to the game, the section on Advancement shows how players should select their next feats and how to prepare long term goals with several examples. After that, How to Fight Nearly Everything (And Survive), gives brief advice on how to battle undead, flying, and unbeatable opponents. Next up, Tactics, shows examples using your abilities and cover for best effect. Using grids, the examples are cleanly laid out and easy to follow.

Other important sections in Chapter Four are notes on using monstrous fighters and monks. The new feat, Large and in Charge, is a great feat to push back those pesky opponents who are determined to get in your face. Even better though is the feat Multitasking, a feat for those monsters with multiple limbs that enables them to use them better. Ever want to know what an ogre's long sword does? The Weapon by Damage Size table will tell you. How about a monk storm giant? Monk damage by size is your table. There are also two examples of combat, one on horse, the other by two swashbucklers, that show dice rolls, stats, and maneuvers. Just as important are the descriptions of what the characters

are doing. New players and GMs can steal those for their own campaigns, and can use them as examples of what the character is doing visually, as opposed to game mechanics.

Chapter Five, Tools of the Trade, lists new melee and ranged exotic weapons. Some of them are very simple, like a bladed gauntlet or bolas. Some are eastern, like the war fan and the three-section staff. All add a little bit more to the campaign that has them for a reason. Ever wonder what a Sai, Jo Stick or Yari does in 3rd edition? Well, instead of making more weapons with new prices, damage, and other statistics, Wizards went with the Weapon Equivalency Table. Here, you see that a Sabre or a Cutlass is the same as a Scimitar and that a Sickle is the same as a Kama. This is a nice table that could've been much bigger, and is in dire need of illustrations.

The next portion, Magic Items, lists new items in categories. Under Shields are the Arrow Catching and Dancing Shield. The Amulet of Mighty Fists and other wondrous items join the sword Shatterspike, reprinted from *The Sunless Citadel*.

Another nice section is the one on Vehicles. Chariots are updated with feats such as Chariot Archery and Chariot Trample. More impressive than the Chariot however, the Halfling War-Wagon, a massive device, looks like it could've come from some post holocaust fantasy setting.

The last section, Towers, Keeps, and Castles, has several examples of each type. Wonder what you can do with those new Chariots? Turn to page 92 for the description of the Gladiator arena, and then 96 for the visual. In addition to the arena, there is an elven canopy tower, a lighthouse tower, and a monk's temple compound among others. Each one is described and has a half- or full-page illustration. For those more interested in the logistics, the start up and yearly costs are also provided.

Dennis Cramer does all of the interior art, so it has a unified feel. But obviously, if you don't like the art style, you won't enjoy the art in this book. The layout is similar to other Wizards of the Coast products with a one inch margin on the outer edge of the page, important information boxed off from the main text, and maps well done and readable. There are a few sections that suffer word order confusion, but if they are there in the second printing, I'd be surprised.

Still, there are some small problems with this product. For example, why all the focus on Prestige Classes? Didn't the *DMG* also have rules for making new classes? One of the new Prestige Classes is Master Samurai. Where's the regular one? In addition, there seemed to be some crossover with a few of these classes. What are the real differences between a Cavalier and the Knight Protector of the Great Kingdom? They are there, but the two are very similar in base concept. Next up, when discussing character concepts, they used the same names as some of the prestige classes. Duelists? Why not swashbuckler? In addition, why such a short weapon equivalency table? Is there going to be a separate book for that? Lastly, I'm not too fond of the reprinted pieces, like the duelist and Shatterspike. Both were very recently put out in the open. Heck, 3rd edition isn't even a year old yet. It's just a little too soon to start reprinting stuff.

Even with these minor complaints though, *Sword and Fist* is an obvious buy for players who enjoy playing fighters and monks. The sections on creating monstrous characters with special feats for them also make this an almost mandatory buy for GMs wishing to continue challenging their players.

Twelve years ago, *The Complete Fighters Handbook* set a standard that not all *Complete* books were able to live up to. I hope that the next few books in the new series, *Defenders of the Faith: Clerics and Paladins*, and *Tome and Blood: A Guidebook to Wizards and Sorcerers*, raise the bar instead of falling beneath it.

(Reviewer's Note: Do not insert this whole book into your campaign without preplanning it. Start slowly with a prestige class here and a magic item there then to overwhelm the campaign with the sheer amount of material found within these pages.)

-- Joe G. Kushner

More Cunning to Be Strange: Wherefore Art Thou *Romeo and Juliet*?

*"Two households, both alike in dignity,
In fair Verona, where we lay our scene,
From ancient grudge break to new mutiny,
Where civil blood makes civil hands unclean.
From forth the fatal loins of these two foes
A pair of star-cross'd lovers take their life;
Whose misadventur'd piteous overthrows
Do with their death bury their parents' strife."*

-- William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, Prologue, 1-8

Before these words were first declaimed, the world did not know its greatest love story. After, it could know no other without them. There may be no better example of the sheer force of [Shakespearean dramaturgical magic](#), in the purest sense, than the hold his *Romeo and Juliet* has on lovers' minds, and the power it has to mold their thoughts. For what is magic but the imposing of the magician's will on others, and on reality? As we've done [in the past](#), then, let's see what sorceries Shakespeare (or his occult masters) spun here, in fair Verona.

*"The fearful passage of their death-mark'd love,
And the continuance of their parents' rage,
Which, but their children's end, nought could remove,
Is now the two hours' traffick of our stage;
The which if you with patient ears attend,
What here shall miss, our toil shall strive to mend."*

-- William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, Prologue, 9-14

Unlike many of Shakespeare's plays, *Romeo and Juliet* has only one plot: the love of the two title characters. The Montague and Capulet families of Verona are engaged in a blood-feud. Romeo, only child of the elder Montague, besotted with the fair Rosaline, sneaks into a Capulet ball with his friends Mercutio (a kinsman of the Prince, not a Montague) and Benvolio (a Montague) to find her. Instead, Romeo finds Juliet, only child of the elder Capulet, and they are immediately smitten with each other. He hides in the Capulet garden to press his suit, and the two lovers agree to a clandestine marriage, which they contract the next day with the aid of Friar Laurence, a herbalist.

However, that afternoon, Tybalt, Juliet's fiery cousin, encounters Benvolio and Mercutio on the street and starts a fight with Mercutio. When Romeo tries to stop the fight, Tybalt uses the distraction to kill Mercutio; Romeo then slays Tybalt in revenge. For this manslaughter, the Prince of Verona exiles Romeo to Mantua; he leaves after secretly consummating his marriage to Juliet. Unknowing, old Capulet betroths the bereft Juliet to the Count of Paris; rather than marry him, she beseeches Friar Laurence to poison her. The good friar suggests a different plan -- Juliet will, indeed, drink poison, but one that will merely put her in a deathlike trance for 42 hours. After her entombment, Romeo will steal her from the crypt and flee with her to Mantua. Unfortunately, Friar Laurence's letter to Romeo miscarries; Romeo, hearing of Juliet's supposed death, buys deadly poison himself and, after killing Paris on the way, breaks into Juliet's tomb. He poisons himself just as Juliet awakens from her trance; in grief, she stabs herself with Romeo's dagger. The watch summon Montague, Capulet, and the Prince; when Friar Laurence tells his tale, they agree to end the feud and erect "golden statues" to the doomed lovers.

*"Ben. He ran this way, and leap'd this orchard wall:
Call, good Mercutio.
Mer. Nay, I'll conjure too.
Romeo! humours! madman! passion! lover!
Appear thou in the likeness of a sigh:*

Speak but one rime and I am satisfied;."

-- William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, II:i:9-14

Shakespeare took this tale from Arthur Brooke's 1562 poem *The tragicall Historye of Romeus and Juliet*. Brooke likely took it from Luigi da Porto's 1535 *New History of The Two Noble Lovers*, which itself borrowed the plot from any number of Italian "novels" going back to Masuccio Salernitano's 1474 collection of romances, *Il Novellino*. Brooke changed the Italian versions, which allowed Romeo and Juliet a final exchange of words in the tomb. Shakespeare follows Brooke here, but breaks from him not only by telescoping the play's action down to six days, but by making Juliet an innocent rather than a wanton to be punished. Shakespeare's reason for insisting on Juliet's purity (he repeatedly states her age as "not yet fourteen") may be allied to his other profound change to the play -- the addition of Mercutio.

Da Porto had a minor character named Marcuccio ("Marcus") in his novella, but Shakespeare turns him from an anonymous spear-carrier to the driving force catalyzing the play. Mercutio brings Romeo to Juliet, Mercutio taunts Tybalt inflaming the feud, Mercutio's death forces Romeo into revenge and exile. Some scholars see Mercutio's character as Shakespeare's tribute to his friend and rival [Christopher Marlowe](#), also dead by violence spilling from a feud -- between Raleigh and Essex -- he had no part in. Mercutio's quick wit, hot temper, and ambivalent sexuality also reflect Marlowe's personality. But Shakespeare joins these "mercurial" characteristics to the emphatically changed name Mercutio. Shakespeare all but flaunts his character's true identity -- that of Mercury, the god of cleverness and speed. And of alchemy.

*"O! mickle is the powerful grace that lies
In herbs, plants, stones, and their true qualities:
For nought so vile that on the earth doth live
But to the earth some special good doth give . . .
Within the infant rind of this weak flower
Poison hath residence and medicine power . . .
Two such opposed foes encamp them still
In man as well as herbs, grace and rude will . . ."*
-- William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, II:iii, 17-30

In this speech, Friar Laurence, almost word for word, encompasses the principles of Paracelsan alchemy, the joining of opposites in the "mickle grace" of herbs, plants, stones -- and their true qualities, their quintessence. It is his elixir that joins Romeo and Juliet forever, although not in the way he claims to have intended. To Romeo as hot-headed sulfur and Mercutio as quick-witted mercury, Shakespeare added Benvolio ("good will") as calming salt, to become the trinity of matter. The other trinity, of the Black Lion, the White Queen, and the Red King, comes from the three bodies in the crypt at the end. Black-hearted Tybalt is the "king of cats." White Juliet, "handmaid to the moon" is "fair," and, as Shakespeare continually reminds us, pure. Finally, Romeo (fiery lover, named for the scarlet city) might well be, as Juliet calls him, "a new day" and "the sun" -- or Rubeo, the alchemical Red Dawn. When the two lovers mingle in the Chemical Marriage of Red and White, they call each other by each other's names ("Juliet is the sun," Romeo is "starry night"). Perhaps this is why Father Laurence deprecates Romeo's love affair with Rosaline -- two "rose" figures cannot become an alchemical union. Mercury/Mercutio brings Red and White together the first time, engineers their separation (sublimation into nigredo) and thus their permanent exaltation. And after the Chemical Marriage and death of the ingredients, the Prince declares the lovers shall become "golden statues."

*"I fear too early; for my mind misgives
Some consequence yet hanging in the stars
Shall bitterly begin his fearful date
With this night's revels, and expire the term
Of a despised life clos'd in my breast
By some vile forfeit of untimely death."*
-- William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, I:iv:115-20

To this alchemical blend, Shakespeare adds astrology. The "star-crossed lovers" from "two opposing houses" give us

early astrological warning, and the characters have planetary identities as well. Mercutio, again, is Mercury; Romeo the Sun, Juliet the virginal Moon; Benvolio is Venus, the Sun's other "morning star." And as in astrology, when Mercury is too close to the sun, it is "combust," its influence killed; Mercutio is slain "under Romeo's arm." His killer, Tybalt, is violent and jealous Mars.

Romeo, the sun, can only see Juliet, the moon, at night. At the balcony scene, Juliet the moon is high in the sky; as the play progresses she goes lower in the sky until she is laid underground in the crypt; the moon is below the horizon. The Nurse's emphasis on Juliet's "fourteen days to her fourteenth year, at night" shows half the lunar cycle; the waning half. At her lowest point, the sun covers her; then, she covers him in a solar eclipse and the death of the sun. ("The sun, for sorrow, will not show his head," says the Prince after Romeo's death.) A solar eclipse, of course, is one of those magickal openings in time, an unnatural moment when mercury might create gold, or something -- or someone -- else emerge.

*"And in this state she gallops night by night
Through lovers' brains, and then they dream of love . . .
O'er ladies' lips, who straight on kisses dream;
Which oft the angry Mab with blisters plagues,
Because their breaths with sweetmeats tainted are . . .
. . . This is that very Mab
That plats the manes of horses in the night;
And bakes the elf-locks in foul sluttish hairs,
Which once untangled much misfortune bodes;."*
-- William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, I:iv:77-97

That someone might be Queen Mab, invoked by Mercutio (him again!) in the speech above as "midwife of dreams"; in other words, a faerie who assists in the birth of a new entity (The True Elixir? The Philosopher's Stone?) from the land of fantasy and dream. Mercutio's "Mab" comes from Maeve, the Celtic triple goddess -- a third triplicity -- who demanded human sacrifice of kings after a ceremonial marriage. Is the Capulet tomb (from *capus* or head) the hollow skull of her deadly mansion? Is Juliet her virgin priestess on Earth, wed by Romeo in alchemical marriage before his needful death? Is Romeo Attis to her Cybele, willing sacrifice to the Faerie Queene -- as Spenser called Shakespeare's patron, Queen Elizabeth? Juliet's birthday is "the night of Lammass Eve," a moon and harvest festival of the ancient Celts. The play begins 14 days before, on July 17, the birthday of Isis -- also Queen of the Night, also the lover of a dead man -- and ends six days later on the cusp of Cancer and Leo, between Moon and Fire. (The same sacrificial day, by the way, that Raleigh alchemically founded the doomed [colony of Roanoke](#).)

Shakespeare, or his sorcerous employers, thus wove his simultaneous astrological and alchemical spells to a climax in the Torment of the Metals and the Solar Eclipse. At that moment, the path is wrenched open into the hollow skull of Verona ("true one") for the Faerie Queene to bring a dream of immortal love and immortal gold. And all it takes is five deaths, and eternal tragedy. Happy Valentine's Day.

Love and Secrets

NPCs don't leave the cap off the toothpaste.

NPCs don't leave the toilet seat up.

NPCs never ask "What are you thinking?", forcing you to come up with something sincere-sounding on the spot, since, "Duhhh . . . nothing . . ." isn't terribly romantic.

No, when an NPC leaves the cap off the toothpaste, it's because they forgot to put it back on when they snuck in and added the deadly neurotoxin to dispose of meddling heroes. When the toilet seat is up, it's because that's a clue the Countess may not be as she appears. And when an NPC wants to know what you're thinking, they'll generally use their mind-crushing psionic powers that most real-world significant others claim not to possess.

Anyway, the point is that, in most games, the only obstacle in beginning a romantic subplot is getting the GM to create a suitable victim . . . er, interest. Once established, the biggest obstacle to furthering a romantic subplot is often time: "Okay, I've been dating the Scarlet Vixen for two game years now . . . guess I should consider asking her to marry me." And the general ways romantic subplots end, if at all, are death and betrayal. Most in-game relationships don't end because she snores and he belches; they end because she dies sacrificing herself to stop the Dude of Darkness, or he suffers a head injury and becomes Crazy Mixed-Up Evil Guy.

Now presuming you're trying to foster romantic subplots, how do you, as a player, create any kind of dramatic tension without resorting to endangering the lady (or laddie) love?

Well, one easy way to do it in cinematic (and even many realistic) campaigns is to do what I do: have secrets.

Generally most characters I create have at *least* one big secret . . . sometimes more. They'll usually also have lots of little secrets. Now, once you have these secrets, it becomes easy (if not trivial) to spice up a romantic subplot. You, as a player or GM, can have a secret be revealed (for example, you used to launder money for the mob). Or you can have the aftermath of a secret be revealed (for example, the mob shows up, asking for a favor, information, or "one last job").

Secrets give a gaming relationship a challenge; they either provide grist for a relationship to end, or they give something for the love to overcome. And, depending on the secret, it can open up new possibilities; the lover who shares in a secret is a classic element of many classic works of literature . . . like Superman and Lois Lane. And, of course, secrets can make for interesting developments even for those non-romantic plots.

Here are some possibilities to consider when coming up with secrets.

- **Secret identity.** "Why can't you be more heroic like Grandiose Guy?"
- **Past lives.** "Well, I *was* a prince . . . until I ran away . . ."
- **Ties to something bad.** "What does DismalCo want with *you*?"
- **Ties to something good.** "You're the one who saved the Vice-President from the evil mutants? Wow . . . they'd be pretty upset if they ever found out . . ."
- **Betrayals.** "How do they know so much about us?!?"
- **Already married.** "You're *WHAT?!?*" (Tin roof rusted.)

Hopefully this will give you some ideas for spicing up your own game romances. Just remember: secrets aren't anywhere *near* as exciting in the real world as they can be in fictitious universes. If you've betrayed your Clan and stolen the Eye of Deminti, and have relocated partly to start a new life with a new identity, but mostly to escape your estranged spouse, make sure you let your current significant other know this.

Preferably *before* the ninjas start attacking.

* * *

Jeremy, I'm sorry.

See, the 9th is Jeremy's birthday. And he wrote me voting against the Valentine's Day Theme Issue, because he doesn't want his birthday associated with that holiday (which he abhors) any more than it already is.

So here's a little gaming birthday anecdote *not* relating to Valentine's Day.

*(Semi-spoiler alert: I talk about one of the metaplot elements from **Aberrant** here . . . but it's in the main book, so isn't much of a secret.)*

When I ran my **Aberrant** campaign I asked everyone to come up the birthdays of their characters. I also started the campaign about eight months before the campaign world "officially" began, so the characters could interact with some of the backstory. I also forbade my players from reading any of the source material, so I could surprise them and control the flow of information.

One of my players picked May 13th for her dour character's birthday. This happened to be the day that Slider, the beloved young heroine of the **Aberrant** universe, was horribly murdered . . . which happened in the eight month backstory window.

So once the fateful day in question arrived, I got to play up the juxtaposition of these two events. "The first sketchy reports are in; it seems America's sweetheart, Jennifer Landers, aka Slider, was killed today in Calcutta. Authorities are still in shock, and the world is mourning the loss of its cherished hero. Oh, and your character got a birthday card."

Ironically, the player in question has a birthday that is the day after JFK was killed.

So . . . happy birthday, Jeremy! <grin>

-- Steven Marsh

* * *

*Last week's answer: **File 13** board game, from *Dragon Magazine* #72 (also seen in the **Best of Dragon Magazine Games**)*

(Four stars) "When the Knights Templar fled France in the 14th century, they took their treasure with them. A treasure so powerful -- so deadly -- so evil that it was locked away from the sight of mankind. Now a race has begun to find this mysterious treasure before it falls into the wrong hands."

Dork Tower!



Dork Tower!



Murphy's Rules



by John Kovalic

Murphy's Rules



Murphy's Rules





by Steven Marsh

Art colored by Keith Johnson

Love is perfectly in place in many settings. In cinematic campaigns love is the catalyst and goal of many a hero. In realistic worlds, love can be as simple or as complex as we make it. And in gothic or tragic worlds, part of the fun can stem from *knowing* that love is doomed.

But there are many campaign worlds where love doesn't spring readily to mind. Neither the cinematic worlds of derring-do nor the tragically hip worlds of the gothic romantic, there are many campaigns where love seems far removed from the cover art. These worlds, like *Dark Sun*, *Twilight: 2000*, *Conan*, and most cyberpunk games, are often bleak, frightening places, where life is cheap, and luxuries like comfort, family, and love are not on the forefront of gaming possibilities. After all, it's difficult to consider wooing the lady fair when everyone's dying of blood poisoning.

But as a basic (albeit complex) human emotion, it seems unlikely love would be obliterated, no matter *how* bleak the world is. And, although it can be difficult to bring love to the forefront in these kinds of games, it can still provide many possibilities often overlooked in darker games.

The Worldview: What's Love But a Second-Hand Emotion?

"REJOICE!" the proclamation read. "For the full moon approaches, and by order of the Shadow King, upon that day those who associate with the opposite sex shall not be put to death! Procreate, and enrich the Shadow Empire."

Some of the first questions that needs to be answered in a darker campaign world, where elements of love are explored, is: What *is* love to this world, currently? How long has it been such? What are the implications? Is there an ideal of love vs. a reality? If so, what are the implications?

In a near-future post-nuclear apocalyptic setting, the ideal of love may not be that far removed from our own, although the realities of maintaining a viable population base, the difficulties in keeping physical beauty, and other obstacles may make this a highly unrealistic ideal; the realities of love in such a setting may be far more mechanical and unromantic. In such a world, romantic movies and books may still be very popular, albeit as escapist fiction; anyone who actually *believes* in those outdated ideas will probably be met with scorn.

But in a harsher fantasy setting, like *Dark Sun* or *Conan*, our ideal of love may be viewed by society as something for the weak. In this case, the world's ideal may be finding a mate who is equally suited to surviving this harsh environment; a soul mate could be simply someone who can watch your back, and for whom you could feel emotions. If they are not weak, then the odds of their succumbing to the savage lands are lessened, and the risk of feeling their loss is minimized. (Conan and Valeria's relationship from the *Conan* stories is a good example of this mindset.) In such a world, regulations for (or against) marriage, the right to bear children, or other draconian measures may be common.

Or in a cyberpunk universe, where drugs are common escapist fare and virtual reality might give you the opportunity to do whatever you want with whomever you want, love might be nothing more than another kick to pursue, another high to indulge in. Or love *might* be something even *more* idealistic or alien; in the future, it's not inconceivable to meet, fall in love, get married, consummate the relationship, and have a child together . . . all without having ever met face-to-face.

In all, society can have *many* views on love and relationships; it's up to the GM to determine what, exactly, that mindset is. As some things to consider, what does the society feel about marriage, children, birth control, divorce, remarriage, polyamory, "true love," etc. Ideas for starting points can be obtained from various cultures and societies; a world with views on love based on feudal Japan might place an emphasis on duty and honor, while one based on the French Romantics may prize passion and persistence.

Personal Views: I Touch No One And No One Touches Me

Shira drank the filtered water slowly, savoring it. As she put the cap back on the canteen, she caught the eye of Doc Davis, who was surprised into betraying a brief flicker of emotion. "These feelings are wrong," she thought. "He's not one of the pure gens. And yet he's so . . . nice . . ."

Having sorted out what society feels about love, it can be helpful to determine how your character feels about love. This may well not differ from the societal norm, or it may vary wildly. For example, a character in the post-apocalyptic setting above may be incapable of feeling love. Or a character in the cyberpunk world may have a reputation online for insisting on commitment and "real" relationships. These views can be either expressed as minor quirks, or major life-affecting core beliefs. Such designations can be useful in differentiating similar characters; one gladiator may look like another, but a gladiator who falls in love easily -- with the pleasures and problems that entails -- will stand out from a sea of others.

Love Among the Ruins



Alternately, the character might not have given it much thought; few of us codify our ideas on love. In this case, you may want to try to at least define the outer edges of what your character is (or isn't) capable of, so as not to *completely* blindside your GM. And if you don't want to fabricate your views out of whole cloth, there are other avenues you can approach the question from.

Backstory: That Music Used to Make Me Smile

"Where did it all go wrong?" thought Jenson as the security slumped to the ground. He began stripping the still-warm body, looking for the passcard. "How did we come to this? 'Lissa, where are you now?"

Many darker worlds weren't always that dark. In fact, many worlds weren't all that bad within living memory. *GURPS Cyberworld*, for example, begins in 2043; the world doesn't turn unrecognizably bleak until 2006 (or 1997, depending on your view). Although it would take an older (50+ years old) character in that world to remember "good times," such a character would have the possibility of a prior romantic relationship. This can serve as a catalyst for the character to try to make the world a better place, or a bitter reminder of why he fights against (or for) the society.

If you want to play a younger character, then perhaps his parents, family members, or a mentor lived in this prior not-so-bad time. In this case, it can be helpful to determine the mindset of the prior generation towards love, as well as how the character's views differ. If mom and dad were happily married, but then dad lost his job in the Crash of '08

and committed suicide, that's probably going to affect the character's view towards love.

Of course, keep in mind that if you base your character's views on his parent's views, you may want to tweak them slightly to indicate the difference the generation gap often makes. Almost certainly there *will* be differing views on romance, in the same way 1945's attitudes towards love and marriage varied wildly from 1970's.

History: The World Will Always Welcome Lovers

Kip held the silver disc up to the light. "Looks old. Twentcent, at least," he muttered, blowing dust off it. "Now . . . what data did this Bing Crosby possess?"

If any sort of "normal" love has been impossible within living memory, then the question has to be asked: has it *ever* been possible? The existence of such, as an ideal, a long-lost possibility, or even an outdated notion can shape the world. Or the very *concept* of love can be hidden or suppressed in the dingy past . . . waiting to be uncovered. (Good inspiration for love being rediscovered, rekindled, or renewed can be obtained from movies like *Brazil* and *Life is Beautiful*.)

In a post-apocalyptic game world divergent from the modern day real world, the question of whether love existed (and how) is easy. In universes which are based on Earth but which diverge in the distant past, the question can be difficult. The rigid code of courtly love as we know it dates to approximately the twelfth century, and the Bible's own sensual [Song of Solomon](#) is older still. A bit of research may be required to determine what love was like before the world diverged, and extrapolation may be required to see where those worlds would end up. Good ideas can come from thinking about the noteworthy events relating to love that were unusual. For example, in 1936 King Edward VIII abdicated the throne after eleven months to marry an American divorcee, Wallis Simpson, to the shock of many. The divorce of the "fairy-tale" marriage between Prince Charles and Princess Di in 1996 was likewise affecting (especially in contrast with their marriage in 1981).

On fictitious bleak worlds where love has been eliminated in recent memory, determining if (and how) society ever expressed love can be even more difficult. Generally, if there was ever a time of peace, prosperity, or other non-awful time to live in, it's probable that some concept of romantic love evolved. Perhaps remnants of ancient ballads or romantic epics can be sung in hushed tones by bards or entertainers, hoping the quaint ideas aren't lost for all time. If the world has always been abysmal, then you may truly be on your own to determine what this world substitutes for love. In general, something needs to ensure that the human race continues; this may be something relatively benign like arranged marriages or pure logic, or it might be something more malevolent like pure animalistic urges, cloning tanks, or forced breeding programs. In this case, a powerful campaign could be built around the simple idea of (eventually) discovering love for the first time. Many far-flung future science fiction stories have been built on this very premise.

Past Loves: Yesterday's Gone

"We have to go back," Durm muttered, as his companions stared slack-jawed and ragged in disbelief. "I lost my locket somewhere in the tower."

If you've determined that your character has known love in the past, then you may want to determine what happened to that love. How that relationship ended can provide material for motivation, plots, or character depth.

Some ways the relationship could have ended:

- Tragically, quite possibly owing to the bleak nature of the world
- Mutually, opening the possibility for a friendly, if emotionally laden, contact in the future
- Mundanely, perhaps shaping the character's attitudes towards love
- Abruptly and/or mysteriously, providing the possibility of rescue, reunion, and perhaps rekindling

"That female pirate looks awfully familiar," thought Orolk, seeing the swift, deadly form emerge from beneath decks. "No . . . it can't be . . ."

Of course, one of the common aspects of many bleak campaigns is how the world changes you; this fact should not be lost if reintroducing a past love. Perhaps the high school sweetheart is now an expert hacker for the corporation; maybe that first love was forced into an arranged marriage to keep the peace between two nations, becoming distant and Machiavellian. Remarkable changes are possible, even in five to ten years.

Or perhaps the person, against all hope, *hasn't* been changed by these dark times. Like a beacon of light, a character may work at a mercy hospital, maintaining a code against killing and valuing life above anything else, while all around life looks remarkably cheap. Such an NPC would be special -- and perhaps vulnerable -- indeed, and many story possibilities present themselves. Is the past love *really* as good as memory serves? How could s/he survive in this bleak world? Were any Faustian deals made, or secrets controlled? If the PC has been changed by the world into something less than pure, can there be any hope for a reunion?

"Richard!" Jen gasped, hand on the assault rifle. "I thought you were dead!"
Richard chuckled and smiled that half-smile she remembered as if it was yesterday. "I get that a lot. Now, can we talk about . . . Operation Booker?"

If the past love ended tragically, don't underestimate the possibility of that love still being exploited by the enemies of the protagonist. In a world where cloning, eldritch necromancy, virtual reality, or communication with the dead is possible, any signs of seeming weakness might be used to attack the character, allowing for interesting roleplaying possibilities. Given a choice of being reunited with the lost love, or losing that love forever, how will the character react?

Now that you have an idea of what love is in the world's present, and understand what it was like in the past (and how it possibly affected the character), you can start adding elements of love to otherwise bleak settings.

The Dreamer: What's Wrong With That?

"There is another way," the HexMail began. "We need not resort to solitary rest chambers in the eve. A demonstration of the possibilities -- and the dangers -- will be realized at midnight . . ."

If none of the party is an idealist with antiquated (or revolutionary) ideas about love, an interesting possibility for a bleak world is to have such a person exist publicly. This could be a phenomenal poet, a singer or songwriter, an author, or other artist. Or it could be someone who elevates the ideals of love through their very existence, like a Romeo and Juliet, or a famous wedding or relationship (like many celebrity couples). Or it might be an archeologist or other scholar who unearths or translates some hidden treatise from times past.

It would be up to the GM (and possible party involvement) to determine what the affect of such a person might be. He might be met with derision and mockery, not unlike the village idiot of times past. He might be met with curiosity or even acceptance, acquiring interested followers in exploring these ideas. In a sufficiently media-savvy world, he might even become a flavor of the moment, inspiring the masses to abandon ideas that society may have forced upon it . . . if only for his fifteen minutes of fame.

Such widespread approval may be very dangerous; if the social order depends on the obedient masses, then having someone spark disobedience -- even in a seemingly benign way -- could be very bad for the forces that keep the world in the state it's in. The person could be in grave danger if he's *too* successful in getting the word out. The PCs could thus get involved on either side, needing to protect or eliminate him.

If this architect of love's knowledge is also a product of the times, he might resort to the methods of his era to convey his message. Thus a cyberpunk amorous poet might resort to hacking into the international newsfeeds to convey his radical ideas, or a post-apocalyptic scholar may secure a compound (complete with followers) to refine his knowledge and research. Again, PCs could be drawn into either side of such a person; he could be an unconventional ally, or an

unusually motivated adversary to defeat. (For a good example of how this person might operate, read the graphic novel *V for Vendetta* by Alan Moore.)

Of course, if a PC *is* an idealist with antiquated (or revolutionary) ideas about love, then any of these plots could directly relate to them . . . with the same results. Perhaps the weathered bard starts attracting a following, or the poems of a PC are uploaded to OpNet.

The Grip Tightens: Darkness Has A Hunger That's Insatiable

"The Overlord has passed a new decree," said Sir Reginald, his face ashen, to his betrothed Irene. "All new brides are, on their wedding night, to be . . ." he couldn't bring himself to finish the thought.

"B-but they can't do this . . . can they?" Irene asked, her thoughts already turning to their wedding date three weeks away.

"Not if I can help it," he said as he put on his armor.

Another way to involve the players with more romantic plots of bleak worlds is, ironically, to take away meager freedoms they may have possessed in the world. If freemen suddenly need to get a license to associate with someone of the opposite sex, or radioactive waste upstream is rendering everyone temporarily sterile, or the possibility of marriage revoked for all but nobles, this can make the game world *more* bleak, and make the characters more involved. Even if not used, there are no privileges so precious as those that have just been taken away. This technique also works well if the world's views on romantic issues had never been explicitly spelled out before. You can say how things were, then say how they are now.

Hopefully, this new condition or obstacle will give the protagonists something to rally against (or for a GM to build adventures around). If and when the heroes succeed in overturning or thwarting this new development, they can feel good about having achieved a victory, despite their being in the same boat as they were before that subplot began . . . only now they're aware of the possibilities surrounding love in this grim world.

The Unattainable Goal: Don't Forget The Best Will Go Wrong

"I really want kids," chuckled Ryan bitterly. "But not in a world like this . . ."

Of course, love and romance also work well as an alternate unobtainable goal for a campaign. Too many bleak settings presume that the PCs will (on some level) be all working to resolve the bleakness: Defeat the Dragon Kings, tear down the Megacorps, or restore global order. While these aims are generally unobtainable (for the most part), they provide a good background goal to loosely build adventures around. But not all protagonists are going to be necessarily working towards that goal, and those that *are* may be doing such for their own reasons. Love and romance all provide good alternate character motivations for bleak worlds. Some examples include:

- Finding a soul mate. S/he's out there, somewhere, and the adventurer's life is probably the best way to meet my one true love.
- Accumulating enough stuff to get out of the game. It's so expensive/dangerous/ruthless in this world, but if I can only get enough credits/protection/power I can protect my loved one.
- Making the world a better place for my true love. So long as there is such evil in the world, we can know no happiness. (Or: because I swore a vow, or want to avenge my beloved's death, or want to learn the truth, I must destroy this evil.)

Or Is It Attainable?: Uncertainty Excites Me

"Don't you see, Kevin?" Alliana said, rubbing her feet through the sand. "This island is my home now . . . and it can be our home, too."

Many bleak worlds have portions of them that aren't so bleak, be it a continent that escaped the effects of the radioactive waste, an otherworldly plane the darkness' tentacles have yet to envelop, or a heavily magnetic mountain that scrambles the satellites' surveillance. These places can serve as a way for the romantically inclined character to "win"; he can escape with his love away from the bleakness, and live if not normal lives, than at least sheltered lives.

Of course, such an escape should not be without its problems; finding this nirvana may be difficult or expensive, or it may need to be claimed (or reclaimed) from forces that occupy it currently. But once found, it can serve as a possible retreat (either temporarily or permanently) for the character.

Ironically, properly played such a safe haven could heighten the bleakness of such a setting. Nothing is quite as stressful as knowing that you only need three more successful runs before you can afford the rest of the island, or realizing that the last component you need to create the interdimensional portal is located inside the Dragon King's lair. And it's perfectly in keeping with the hopelessness of the setting to have the protagonist fail with the goal within grasp.

And the existence of such a place provides plot elements of its own. What if the antagonists learn of it? What if the hero leaves his true love in this refuge, and returns to find her missing? Can you ever *really* escape the game?

The more inhuman the world, the more difficult it can be to keep the players emotionally attached to it. Fortunately love can both enhance and contrast the darkness of these worlds. Ironically, despite being one of the most ephemeral of emotions, love can also serve as a powerful anchor, making bleak worlds more real and grounded.



by John Macek

Were you thinking of running a swashbuckler campaign using *Third Edition D&D*? Were you hoping to find a decent selection of firearms in the new *Dungeon Masters Guide*? Well, in all likelihood you were sorely disappointed. But weep no more, fellow DMs. This article is here to assist with descriptions of some common black powder weapons, simple rules on how to use them in the game, and a few new feats to keep those firearm toting players happy!

The Musket

One of the main firearms of the swashbuckling era was the musket. It was a smoothbore weapon, used primarily by the military, but also found among civilians. They were built in a variety of sizes and weights. Most were large caliber weapons, and some of the largest needed to be used with a musket rest due to their weight. The table below gives values for two types of musket.

The first, a standard musket of about .65 caliber, was a type that did not require a musket rest. It was fairly common throughout this era. Eventually muskets of this type supplant the second type completely, and have a long reign on the battlefield.

The second was the large musket, caliber .80 or above. Because of its great length and weight medium sized creatures must brace this musket before firing on a musket rest, on a wall, ledge, battlement or rigging. Large muskets fired in this manner receive a +1 to hit modifier due to firing from a stable platform. However, when fired without a rest of some sort, they incur a -2 to hit penalty. Creatures with a 16 or greater strength can manage the large musket without bracing. If used in this manner the +1 modifier is lost. If a rest is used, the +1 bonus is retained. Small sized creatures find this type of musket too unwieldy to use at all.

Weapon	Cost	Damage	Critical	Range	Increment	Weight	Type
Musket, .65 cal	70 gp	1d10	x3	100 ft	10 lbs		Piercing
Musket, .80 cal	80 gp	1d12	x3	150 ft	15 lbs		Piercing

The Rifle

The rifle differed from the musket in that it was a weapon with groves -- rifling -- inside the barrel. This rifling imparted spin to the bullet, and thereby caused the bullet to fly straighter, which gave the rifle greater accuracy. But in order for this to work, the bullet needed to be tightly seated in the chamber, so rifles were slow to load. Slower loading meant they were not as useful on the battlefield. This, and the fact that in the swashbuckling age creating a rifled barrel was expensive, meant that rifles were quite often the playthings of the nobility. As such, many had inlay of precious metals, wood, or ivory, and used the most complex and expensive locks -- wheellocks and flintlocks. Rifles of this nature would be considered masterwork quality. Toward the end of the age of swashbucklers, rifles became commonplace.

Listed below are the values for an ordinary rifle of the period. These do not reflect any modifications due a masterwork item. Consult the *Player's Handbook* page 114 for details on how to make a masterwork rifle.

Weapon	Cost	Damage	Critical	Range	Increment	Weight	Type
Rifle, .55 cal	100 gp	1d8	x3	200 ft	7 lbs		Piercing

The Pistol

This really was the weapon that made all men equal, and no swashbuckling campaign would be complete without the pirate armed with a brace of pistols. Due to their small size, pistols with belt hooks could be worn suspended from a sash or belt. It was commonplace among the seafaring scalawags of the day to wear as many as six hanging in such a fashion. If not worn with belt hooks, they were worn in holsters on shoulder straps, or just carried in hand. Pistols, like rifles, were usually expensive wheellocks at the beginning of this era. By the end of it, flintlock pistols were found in abundance.

Two pistols are given in the table below. The small pistol represents a smaller pistol, about .50 caliber or less, a type that might be hidden away in a gentleman's valise, or possibly a coat pocket. Horse pistols and Sea Service pistols, and others above .50 caliber, should use the stats for the large pistol.

Weapon	Cost	Damage	Critical	Range	Increment	Weight	Type
Small pistol	20 gp	1d6	x3	30 ft	2.5 lbs		Piercing
Large pistol	40 gp	1d8	x3	40 ft	4 lbs		Piercing

Lock Types

Muskets, rifles and pistols were made up of three basic components -- lock, stock and barrel. Of these components, the one that varied the most between early swashbuckling firearms and later period examples was the lock, which is the system used to ignite the black powder. The most common lock types were, in chronological order, matchlock, wheellock and flintlock.

The matchlock used a smoldering length of matchcord held by a metal clamp called a serpentine to ignite powder in a pan when the trigger was pulled. There were some obvious drawbacks to this system. Reliance on the lit match meant: there was a danger of accidental black powder explosions; troops were easily spotted at night by the glow of the match match (+1 Spot check per matchlock); and that in bad weather there was a chance the match might go out (see the *Dungeon Master's Guide* page 87 for rules on how weather effects flames). On the positive side, the mechanism was cheap and reliable. Reduce the price of any matchlock by 20% of the listed cost.



Wheellocks, unlike matchlocks, were expensive and complex, because the lock had more working parts. It consisted of a wheel driven by an internal spring, a hammer holding a piece of pyrite in a clamp, and a pan for the priming powder. The wheel/spring mechanism was wound from the outside by way of a key called a spanner. While difficult to manufacture, this

system had an important advantage over the matchlock -- it could be loaded and held ready to fire indefinitely. However, there is a drawback to this, if a loaded wheellock is dropped it may discharge (25% chance of accidental misfire, roll d8 for direction of shot, anyone along that angle has a 5% chance of being hit). Increase the price of any wheellock firearm by 15% of the listed prices. Many wheellocks are masterwork items (reduce the chance of a dropped masterwork wheellock misfiring to 10%).

Flintlocks, which for the purposes of this article also include snaphaunces, doglocks, and miquelet locks, have the same advantage as the wheellock. They too can be carried ready to fire. In fact, the invention of the flintlock brought about the demise of the wheellock, and the matchlock as well (though matchlocks continued to be used for some time afterwards because of their low cost). In a campaign that takes place early in the swashbuckling era (for instance, in an early 1600s Elizabethan campaign) the price of flintlocks should be doubled.

Using Firearms in Combat

Loading black powder firearms takes a good bit of time. The most highly trained troops of the era were expected to average about one shot every 15 seconds. Others less highly trained would take longer. To load a rifle properly took longer still. The following table shows the number of full-round actions needed to load each type of firearm. These need not be consecutive, but can be spaced out between other actions.

Number of Full-Round Actions Needed to Load:

Musket	4
Pistol	4
Rifle	10

Attacking

Attacking with a firearm is handled using the same method as with any other ranged weapon. The attack action may include a 5 foot move, with the exceptions being the large musket used with a rest and the Marksman feat (see below). In these instances the firer must stand still to make an attack.

Firearms and Armor

Armor was of little use against firearms at close range. From point blank range out to three range increments the target receives no benefit from armor. Targets at a range beyond three increments, but within six increments, receive half the usual armor bonus. Those targets that at six and beyond gain full benefit from armor.

Feats

For a campaign set in this time period black powder weapons no longer considered unusual. Thus, these weapons are no longer Exotic Weapon Proficiencies. Instead, treat them as Simple Weapon Proficiencies.

The usual ranged weapon feats can be used with these new weapons. However, the following new feats should make things a bit more interesting for those using guns.

Marksman [General]

You are skilled at firing on a target's weak point at medium and long range.

Prerequisites: Dex 13+ and a Base attack bonus of +4 or higher.

Benefit: This feat allows the attacker to ignore his target's armor at ranges beyond three increments. If the target is unarmored, the attacker gains a +1 bonus to hit.

Speedy Reload [General]

You are well trained in the methods of reloading the musket, rifle or pistol.

Prerequisites: Dex 13+ and a Base attack bonus of +1 or higher for musket or pistol; Str 13+, Dex 13+ and a Base attack bonus of +1 or higher for rifle.

Benefit: The number of actions required to reload is reduced by one-half. This feat may be taken multiple times, but only to gain the feat for one of the other types of firearm.

Conclusion

These rules should provide sufficient information to allow you to introduce a more accurate version of black powder firearms into your swashbuckling *D&D* campaign.

References

- *Firearms in Colonial America*, M.L. Brown.
- *Boarders Away Volume II, Firearms in the Age of Fighting Sail*, William Gilkerson.



by **D.L. Ganger**

Getting a group through character generation so that you can start playing, especially when your players have a wide variety of gaming experience, can be extremely difficult for both the GM and the players. This is especially true if you're introducing a new or modified campaign setting that your players are not familiar with. One of the most frustrating parts of character generation is trying to create a fully-fleshed character when you don't really know that character's world. This frustration can cause players to fall back on overused concepts in order to complete the character sheet. Here's an example.

You're sitting down at a table with your recently assembled gaming group, ready to start a new campaign in a fresh, unfamiliar world. Your experienced players already have their rulebooks out before them. The two brand-new players sit there, nervously fidgeting with their borrowed dice, excited but unsure of what they should be doing. Already, queries are being tossed at you more quickly than you can respond. "What house rules are we using?" "What kind of world is this?" "How powerful are our characters going to be?" You smile slightly, swallow your mouthful of soft drink, and begin introducing your players to Earth in the 22nd century as you pass out blank character sheets.

"As the occupants of Housing Sector Philadelphia-65ZD rise on the morning of July 1, 2113 AD, it is with lighter hearts than most days. The beginning of Third Quarter, this day is one of the four Birth Days of the year, when 125 proud couples -- approximately 1 person for every 1,000 who live in the Sector -- are granted reprieve from their normal work schedule and allowed to proceed through winding corridors to the gleaming halls of the Sector Birth Institute, there to solemnly receive a healthy, squirming infant, product of their flesh. It has been a long year since their Reproductive License was granted and their sperm and ova harvested, to begin the nine-month gestation period at the Institute.

"The parents queue up in a line, quietly conversing, until it is time to accept guardianship of their child. Your parents are in that line, holding their copy of the License in eager hands. They are good, solid midscale citizens with enough social credits to have guaranteed that you have been corrected of major defects, but not enough to have earned the privilege of custom genetic counseling, nor the right to determine gender. Discovery of whether you are a boy or girl is the first of the surprises in store for them this day, and as they walk back to their quarters, they discuss one last time what your name will be, so that they may comply with EarthGov policy requiring your name to be registered by the end of the day. Take a moment and decide your name and gender and fill them out on your character sheet. We'll fill in the rest later as we go. . . ."

At the end of this two hour *GURPS Space* session, two experienced gamers and two new players had worked their way through 18 years of character history and completely developed their characters. Each PC was well-defined with unique (and appropriate) skills, advantages, and disadvantages, a well-fleshed character history, and solid interaction with the other PCs. All four players were completely intrigued by the world they were in and were eager to continue, even though no one had found the world to be what they expected from the short description they had going in. If you are willing to do some planning, start the game with empty character sheets, and follow two simple rules, your sessions can be this easy and fun.

Rule Number One: Throw your players in the deep end. Do

not waste time dryly describing your writeup. Instead, immerse the characters in events before the players have a chance to think about mechanics. As with the example above, the events do not have to be happening directly to the PCs as long as they set the stage for their later actions. The key is exploration, not explanation; it's fine to drop a bit of exposition here and there as long as you return the focus back to the PCs on a regular basis. Relate it all back to them and how it affects them. This is possibly the most effective way to get the feel of your campaign across in vivid, living detail.



Rule Number Two: Control the options your players have during character creation. Do not hesitate to dictate their starting conditions or limit their choices along the way. In fact, if you don't practice some pruning, you run the risk of overwhelming the storyline. The trick to successful application of this rule is intimate knowledge of how the PCs fit in. If you have put some forethought into your world, the result will be a setting that comes alive from the very beginning. Your players will easily discover, explore, and choose their roles, and you'll have all the opportunity you need to guide character development and interaction without causing resentment. Always give them choices -- but be in control of what the choices are.

So, you've seen the opening shot. How does this translate out through the rest of the character creation process? The precise details are up to you, but here's one way to handle it. Let us continue with the example.

The GM wants to run a *GURPS Space* campaign centered on the EarthGov Navy, locked in a war with a rebellious colony planet. He wants the PCs to end up as young officers in the EarthGov fleet, eventually facing a painful moral struggle as they realize the depths of slavery practiced by their government against its own citizens, and are given the choice of either opposing the only culture they've ever known or being willing participants in its depravity.

First, they need a thorough indoctrination in the culture of their oppressive government. A few short anecdotes (the food fight in the common cafeteria area that resulted in their family's food rations being cut for three months) help set more of the world in place. By the time they begin school at age four, Al, Anne, John, and Jane are all old acquaintances from their daycare facility and from life in the Housing Sector.

They spend the next 12 years following the standard curriculum, which will bring them up to their currently allowable maximum of 32 points in skills: 8 points of math and science skills, 8 points in soft science skills such as History, 8 points in library/literacy skills such as Research and Computer Ops, 2 points in Area Knowledge (Housing Sector Philadelphia-65ZD), 1 point in Law (EarthGov Civil), and 5 points in elective skills, as approved by the local administration. The GM encourages the players to think carefully about their choices; their skill levels will play a role in determining their characters' future careers.

During this time, the players have the opportunity to spend extra points on their basic stats, Advantages, Disadvantages, and Quirks. In this case, the GM has ruled that points may be spent on anything (barring skills) up until the end of the sixteenth year, but once points are taken or spent, they cannot be returned. This helps avoid bringing the roleplay to a screeching halt through min-maxing. It also encourages players to raise or lower attributes one level at a time.

At the end of the PCs sixteenth year, they take a standardized EarthGov aptitude exam that determines their future career choice. There are two main life paths, 2 years of secondary education, or 2 years of vocational instruction. Luckily, one of EarthGov's colonies has just declared independence, and the Navy prefers its draftees to have the

secondary education. Al is accepted as a candidate for Engineering School, Anne's math aptitudes put her straight into Astrogation Officer training, and Jane's interest in psychology sends her into training as a Political Officer. John, however, fails to make the cut by a hair and is instead sent to learn how to service automatic food distribution systems on luxury spaceliners.

The PCs are given 4 points to spend on skills appropriate to their State-chosen careers and are asked at this time to finalize their totals. Any remaining points spent outside of skills at this point are subject to GM approval.

By this point, two or three hours have passed; not only do the PCs have full write-ups, but they have full history and interaction with each other. Additionally, the players walk away from this first session with a good grasp on character and motivation.

It is at this point the GM can bring Al, Anne, and Jane back together again on board the ESS Constancy for the first training cruise of Class 2113-2 of the Naval Academy. As it just so happens, John is assigned to the same vessel as Lead Food Service Technician (a duty that is handled by non-military personnel on training vessels). When neglect causes a breakdown of the engines, the party is ready to swing into action as a well-integrated team to save the ship and earn glory for themselves (and a coveted mid-season appointment to the Naval Academy for John).

Although this example may seem contrived, the devil is in the details. It all depends on how well you know your world and can show it to the PCs. You are revealing the setting one step at a time. You control the presentation. If you firmly limit the choices offered to the PCs, while making sure that those choices are genuine, you will see your party respond -- possibly with some of the best roleplaying they've produced.

This technique works for all settings and systems, not just *GURPS* -- but it doesn't work for all GMs, and it may not work well with all players. *D20* and *AD&D Second Edition* work just as well with this method, as does *7th Sea* or *Dragon Fist*; however, fans of pure hack and slash may not get as much out of this. The start of your campaign sets the tone, not the game system. These two simple rules can be one of your most valued tools in producing a vibrant, dynamic world that your players want to explore, and can make your entire gaming experience more rewarding.

Pyramid Review

Diablo II: Diablerie (for D&D)

Published by [Wizards of the Coast](#)



Written by JD Wiker

96 b & w pages; \$19.95

So what does the *Diablerie* book bring to 3rd edition? In many ways, this is a complete update of *Diablo II: The Awakening*. For example, the five classes from *Diablo II*, done up for 2nd edition in *The Awakening*, are translated into 3rd edition stats. This time around, the classes have a much more unique feel to them. The Necromancer, shortchanged a bit in *The Awakening*, gets better hit dice and combat ability, as well as specific monsters when casting his golem spells. The Barbarian, still using a d12 for hit dice, is given a whole slew of abilities. Each class can advance up to 25th level, so those who wonder what the base attack bonuses and saving throw bonuses for the core classes, look at the corresponding class in *Diablo*.

Because third edition uses feats to accomplish powerful abilities, the Amazon and Paladin both lose their spell casting abilities; they instead get their abilities through magical groups. The groups correspond to the skill trees in the actual *Diablo* game with groups being broken up into six levels. For the Barbarian, some early levels are Axe Mastery, equal to weapon focus with axes, and Find Potion, which allows the barbarian to make a search check with a difficulty of 20 to find a healing potion. Higher level abilities include concentrate attack which gives the barbarian a bonus to hit his target, a penalty to his armor class against the target, but a bonus to his armor class against anyone else attacking him.

The brief section on skills relies on the reader to be familiar with the skill system from the *Player's Handbook*, and includes Alchemy, Craft, Knowledge, and Profession. The section ends with a listing of all skills crossed with all classes. A quick glance will tell the reader if a Barbarian can use spellcraft (no), or sport (yes), and if it's a class skill or a class cross skill.

Chapter Two covers the equipment of the *Diablo* universe, bringing over all the new weapons and armor types from the game. New weapons like war staff or battle staff take their place alongside new armor types like gothic and ancient. More impressive than the new equipment, however, are the new options. In *Diablo*, weapons and armor suffer damage and need to be repaired. While *3rd Edition* has rules for hardness and hit points, *Diablerie* carries them a bit further with rules on what happens with items reaching lower durability scores, what skills are needed to repair said items, and a random item damage table. Still, these rules aren't for everybody, because they can add some time to combat.

The spells of the Necromancer and Sorcerer are detailed in chapter three. Each list is broken down by class, then level, with another listing of all spells in alphabetical order. More important to a non-*Diablo* based campaign though, is that each spell has an equivalent level. Blood Golem, a 4th level Necromancer spell, is a 7th level cleric spell. Thunder Storm, a 5th level Sorcerer spell, is a 7th level wizard spell.

The fourth chapter covers the magic items from the *Diablo* setting. Unfortunately, this material has seen the light of day on both the Wizards of the Coast web site, and in *Diablo II: The Awakening*. Tweaks have been made to insure *3rd Edition* compatibility, but it's essentially the same. Items are broken up into three parts: A prefix, a root, and a suffix. Both prefix and suffix give the item powers, while the root is the item type. This gives you options like Godly Ancient Armor of Deflection which gives the user a +15 to his armor class (+16 against missiles) and absorbs 6 points of damage from each attack. It's a nice system that provides a lot of random items. Some, like said armor above, may

not be appropriate for a non-*Diablo* game.

Chapter five, monsters, is (like chapter four) drawn directly from *The Awakening* save for that it's for *3rd Edition*. Like *The Awakening*, each monster has a base type -- say, Claw Viper -- and then several sub type underneath that, like Tomb Viper, Claw Viper, Salamander, Pit Viper, and Serpent Magus. Each entry goes from weakest to strongest, so the Tomb Viper is a challenge rating of 2, while the Serpent Magus is 6. Unfortunately, there are some classic creatures from *Diablo* missing from this book, like the Hidden and the Mud Demons. The worst thing about this chapter is that the Lesser Evils and their more powerful masters, The Prime Evils, are missing. Strange having a book about the world of *Diablo* without having *Diablo* himself in the product!

Chapter six introduces the players to the *Diablo* world through Morgen Keep, a brief five page adventure that lists monster encounters for players of levels 1st through 6th. Still, the adventure is too short and gives very little information on the setting.

The book ends with a double sided character sheet suitable for copying.

If you already own *Diablo II: The Awakening* and are comfortable with conversions between *2nd* and *3rd Edition*, then *Diablerie* isn't for you. There is too much repeated material with too little new in it. If you love *3rd Edition* but don't want to bother with all of the unique elements of the *Diablo* world, yet want the setting, this book won't help you with that. Lastly, if you want to run through the *Diablo II* adventure, this book won't provide you with the maps, quests, and characters as *The Awakening* did with the first *Diablo* game.

The book does a fantastic job of bringing the unique classes, magic items, monsters, and weapons of the *Diablo* world to *3rd Edition* but very little in terms of what to do with it. If you're going to buy the next *Diablo II* book, *To Hell and Back* (due in March), this is a worthy investment for *Diablo* fans, and if you just want to expand your *D&D* campaign with all the goodies within, you may not go wrong with the *Diablerie* book.

-- Joe G. Kushner

Pyramid Review

Flagstones (a True Type Font)



Produced by [Cumberland Games](#)

Created by **S. John Ross**

\$4.00

For some people, myself most certainly included, gaming has always had a very strong visual component. I have never participated in an RPG campaign that did not involve miniatures in some way, shape, or form . . . usually moved about on a properly scaled map or a board full of elaborately prepared scenery.

Lacking any trace of drafting skills, I've always been limited to using map boards that others have produced. I have a large collection of such items -- a collection that has grown with tremendous speed ever since I combined an internet connection with a color printer -- but until now I have remained unable to make my own map boards.

Flagstones, produced by Cumberland Games, is a True Type Font that allows the user to quickly and easily create simple dungeons and building interiors -- both as small maps and as printed floorplans large enough to game on. It's not at all difficult to use; once it's been installed, creating an unbroken line of five different *Flagstones* is as simple (literally) as typing "abcde". This can be used to create a grid that forms a room or corridor in a matter of seconds, and a pair of half *Flagstones* (created by typing "1" and "!") can be used to make a staggered pattern that looks good and functions as a pseudo-hex pattern.

In addition to the basic flagstone pattern, the letters "f" through "j" produce unbroken stone tiles, and typing the letters "k" through "o" creates some nifty cobblestones . . . ideal for city streets and areas that have seen a lot of weathering.

The first three number keys each produce half-tiles -- two for each of the three different *Flagstones* styles. The number keys "4" through "7" produce a total of eight different spiral and straight stair sections, and the "8" key produces a trap door. Finally, the underscore key ("_") creates a rough line that can be used to divide a room into sections.

I have found that setting the font size to "90" results in tiles about 1 inch square, but you may need to experiment a bit to find the exact size to suit your needs.

The *Flagstones* tiles can be used as-is -- they print out very nicely on gray or light brown paper -- or they can be given color or texture in a painting program before they are printed out. For example, I have superimposed the *Flagstones* on a granite texture produced by the standard Windows drawing application. As I've already mentioned, *Flagstones* can also be used to create very attractive maps. It's a nice change if your artistic abilities have heretofore limited you to boring grids drawn on graph paper.

Flagstones is a complete product, but it would be nice to have a few other accessories as part of the font. The trap door is excellent, but an overhead view of a standard door would be very useful. It's easy enough to create simple doors using a drawing program, but including something in the font itself would make the creation process even easier.

One warning: playing with *Flagstones* can be somewhat addictive.

Intending only to see how well it worked, I was up until 2:00 AM the night that I purchased it, creating an elaborate dungeon complex that would cover over twenty sheets of paper if I were to print it out. Which, inevitably, I will. Fortunately, I've just purchased some new ink cartridges for my printer.

-- *John Xavier Crimmins*



by **Steven Marsh**

Around the World in 80 Thrills is a four-part Cliffhangers adventure set in the 1930s (the popular "world on the brink of war" setting). One part will appear each month from now until May. Each part is written by a different author, making this also a Round Robin event:

- Part One -- Steven Marsh
- Part Two: [The Steps of Chiushan](#) -- James Maliszewski
- Part Three: [The Minos Touch](#)-- Bob Portnell
- Part Four: [The Atlantis Crystal](#) -- Steve Kenson

Stats are presented for **GURPS**. Additional stats appearing for **Fudge** presented in **bold italic red**. Stats for **Big Eyes, Small Mouth 2nd Edition** have also been presented in blue boxes with white text. The adventures should also be generic enough that they can be used in a variety of systems.

"When Suddenly . . ."

The sounds of the rain falling on the plane's wings are drowned out as the starboard engine explodes in a ball of fire; the entire plane banks left, shuddering to compensate. You drop your complimentary champagne. Amid the panicked screams of the passengers, you notice a dark-suited man in the back of the plane wrestle the little girl out of her mother's lap next to him. He draws a pistol from a holster around his ankle and holds it to the child. "You'll save us, heroes, or else," he snarls.



What do you do?

What's Going On?

It is the late 1930s.

The Heroes are aboard a commercial flight going from Midway Airport in Chicago, Illinois, to San Francisco Municipal Airport (Mills Field) in California. They are going to meet with Jill Spires, the competent and comely assistant (and daughter) of Dr. Reginald Spires, Professor of Archeology at the University of California (at Berkeley).

Unfortunately, Fate has also booked Francis "Frost" Palone on the same flight. Frost believed the he could quit being a hitman for the Chicago mob and "borrow" enough money to start life anew in California.

He is sadly mistaken.

Frost was to be an object lesson of what -not- to do to the mob. The mob paid off (or intimidated) the people necessary to plant three explosive charges on the plane's engines. They were -supposed- to be timed to explode at the same time, but the rain has shorted out one of the charges so it detonated early.

So now Frost has taken a hostage, the other explosives will go off Real Soon, and the complimentary champagne has spilt.

Of course, the GM *could* start the adventure in a traditional way, with them receiving a letter (see below), deciding to take the plane, and then having mayhem ensue. But if your players would find it fun, the pulps are often better served by beginning with a cliffhanger.

In Medias Res

This encounter is designed to bring the players up to the breakneck speed of pulp fiction, and should be tailored for your players' skills, with suitable complications added depending on their skills and interests.

- **Pilot:** The main pilot can be shot or have a heart attack, and the co-pilot is unable to fly in rainy weather.
- **Doctor:** The main pilot can have a heart attack (or, if there's a pilot PC, shot).
- **Dilettante:** The other passengers start panicking, endangering themselves and everyone else. They need the soothing words of a level head.
- **Reporter/Photographer:** This is news in the making! Perhaps the camera slid towards the front of the plane when the first engine went down.
- **Multiple daredevils:** If there are a number of physical adventurous types, perhaps the engines weren't merely destroyed, but are still on fire. While one disarms the bombs, the other needs to use an extinguisher to put out the fires before they destroy the wings.
- **G-Man:** A suitcase full of one hundred thousand dollars is sliding around the cabin, and threatens to fly out the plane. Not only is it a chunk of change in this Depression Era, it's evidence!

The two remaining explosives are timed to go off at the same time. The one on the port wing can only be accessed from the outside, requiring a wing-walking daredevil who can disarm the bomb (or two people working in tandem). The one in the front can be easily accessed from underneath when the plane is landed . . . which isn't much of a consolation in the air. Fortunately it *can* also be accessed from inside the plane, provided a gadgeteer can take apart (or a strong person can rip) the panels preventing access from the cockpit. (If no one has skills in demolitions, the co-pilot is an ex-Great War munitions expert, and, provided the players can protect him, disarm the bombs.)

Even if the PCs fail to disarm one of the explosives, the plane can still survive; triple-redundancy is common for planes of this era. If all three charges go off then it'll be a bumpy landing . . . one worthy of an ace pilot.

For GMs running a more horrific campaign, there are numerous options to make this encounter even more horrifying. Any occult artifacts or other Things Man Was

Model 80A-1 (AKA the "Flying Pullman")

The Flying Pullman is a large passenger biplane with three engines: one in front and one between the two wings on each side. It was introduced in 1928, and was the first plane to offer stewardess service in 1930.

Crew: 3 (one pilot, one co-pilot, one registered nurse/stewardess -- behind a closed door at the front of the plane)

Passengers: 18 (six rows of three seats)

Engines: 3 (one in front, one on either wing)

Maximum Speed: 138 mph

Cruising Speed: 125 mph

Range: 460 miles

The exit is on the port side at the back of the airplane; it can be opened, though it is latched and takes a deliberate action to do so.

Francis "Frost" Palone

Not Meant To Know that the Heroes may possess could easily break loose, threatening to unleash their evil, spill over the side and be lost, or the like. Any dark forces the Heroes may have angered in the past might also make an appearance now, even if only to feed off the terror of the passengers; glimpses of terrifying forces out the plane's windows should set the player's mind on edge.

Presuming the PCs defeat Frost, disarm the explosives, and save the day, the plane limps the rest of the way to Mills Field. On the way they will be treated to another glass of champagne and extra peanuts, and the Heroes can reflect on the letter that got them in this mess.

The Letter and the Mission

To Whom It May Concern:

I have heard it on good authority that you are as skilled as you are discreet. I pray this is true.

I have need of a band of civic-minded individuals to aid in the confirmation of a discovery potentially great in import and national interest. I fear that I cannot say any more at this time, as I do not fully trust postal delivery methods. (Nor do I trust the telephone company.)

Please find enclosed airplane tickets for you all. My assistant Jill will meet you at the airport and escort you to me. I cannot stress enough the need for discretion.

Sincerely,

*Reginald Spires
Professor of Archeology
University of California*

This letter should be tailored towards the group in question (addressed to someone specific, the "good authority" is an actual person, etc.).

Jill Spires meets the PCs on the airfield; she is focussed but pleasant. As the police cart off Frost (or his body) and a band of mechanics scramble to repair the plane, she'll ask, "Nice flight?" She will be sympathetic and glad they are alive, but not overly surprised to hear of their troubles. They -are- Heroes, after all . . .

She'll make small talk as she drives the Heroes to the University of California, but won't divulge much about the mission. She *will* take the opportunity to compliment them on any public escapades they may have had; any romantic subplots could

ST: 12 (*Fair*)

DX: 11 (*Fair*)

IQ: 13 (*Good*)

HT: 11 (*Mediocre*)

Speed: 5.5; **Move:** 5

Dodge: 5; light leather jacket (PD1/DR1), no encumbrance.

Advantages:

Combat Reflexes

Luck

Cool

Disadvantages:

Enemy: FBI (appears rarely)

Sadism

Skills:

Brawling-14 (*Good*)

Guns (Pistol)-16 (*Great*)

Law-10 (*Mediocre*)

Criminology-11 (*Mediocre*)

Stealth-10 (*Mediocre*)

Streetwise-11 (*Mediocre*)

Body 5 Mind 6 Soul 6

Attributes

Divine Revelation -- 3,

Combat Mastery -- 1,

Highly Skilled -- 1

Defects

Unique Character Defect (Sadistic) -- 1, Wanted -- 1

Skills

Gun Combat -- 3, Law -- 1,

Stealth -- 1, Urban Tracking

-- 1, Unarmed Attack -- 2

The Kensington Stone

The Kensington Stone is a stone found in Kensington, Minnesota. It is inscribed

easily begin here.

Dr. Spires will meet the Heroes at his office in the Anthropology Museum. After introductions are made (including the possibly awkward for the romantically inclined: "And you've already met my daughter, Jill . . ."), he will explain his troubles.

"I have a graduate student named Philip Inell who was researching evidence of Viking inhabitation of Minnesota, starting with the Kensington Stone. He rang me two weeks ago to say he had made a potentially shocking discovery -- a book of great interest that was older than the Stone, and didn't seem to have anything to do with the Norse. He didn't feel safe in discussing it any further, but promised he would call within a few days on a more secure line to update me.

"I haven't heard from him since.

"I'm not a young man, and feel unsure in investigating the matter myself. I'd heard of your exploits, and hoped you would bring the matter to resolution. In short, you need to find Philip *and* this book."

If asked, Dr. Spires will present information on the Kensington Stone and the enigma in question.

At this point, the party may be ready to go. Dr. Spires has arranged for a Stinson-Detroit six-seat plane to take the Heroes to the Minneapolis Municipal Airport, where they can either rent a car or take a train the remaining 100 miles west/northwest to Kensington, a small farming community about 50 miles east of the North & South Dakota border. Given the number of stops the train needs to make, travel time will be approximately the same (2-4 hours); rail is more comfortable, but a car will provide more travel options once there.

As they leave, though, Jill will try to persuade the party to let her accompany them. She will be quite persuasive, arguing that she knows almost as much as her father about Viking culture and history, knows pertinent details about the dig, and can pilot a plane as well. She will not insist, however (though she will pout if not permitted).

Kensington, Minnesota

The trip to the airport and then to Minnesota will be uneventful (though an evil GM might try to scare players by asking, "Who's sitting by the exit?" or other questions). The players will then have the option of going to Kensington or (if Jill is there) searching the site.

Kensington is a tiny farming community with about 200 people. It's about 0.14 square miles big. There is just one street of note within the city: Central Avenue, which is divided into North and South by the railroad track, which belongs to the Soo Line. The Soo Line is the railway that primarily serves Minnesota, Wisconsin, and North Dakota.

The entire population of the town is currently terrified . . . and not without good reason. The entire town is held in the grip by Dante della Griva, an Italian "grave robber" who was rejected from the international archeological community due to his callous disregard for proper procedures.

with Viking runes, which translate to:

8 Swedes and 22
Norwegians on a
discovery voyage from
Vinland westward, we
had anchored by 2 rocky
islets one days voyage
north from this stone.
We had fished a day,
after we came home
[we] found 10 men red
with blood and dead.
AV(E) M(ARIA) deliver
from evil. We have 10
men at sea to look after
our ship 14 days voyage
from this island. Year
1362

It is considered by many to be proof of significant Viking inland involvement long before Christopher Columbus's voyage, but it is also considered to be a hoax by many. Substantiating proof, in the form of other evidence of Viking involvement, has so far been maddeningly difficult to find.

Jill Spires

ST: 10 (*Mediocre*)

DX: 12 (*Fair*)

IQ: 14 (*Good*)

HT: 11 (*Mediocre*)

Speed: 5.75; **Move:** 5

Dodge: 5; light leather jacket (PD1/DR1), no encumbrance.

Advantages:

Beautiful

Danger Sense

Strong Will +2

Dante, a staunch member of the Fascist party, has brought his crew (or, more correctly, gang) to Kensington; they have secured this city and used strong-arm tactics to keep everyone quiet.

The city is otherwise unremarkable and should contain items of interest to a small farming town (farm buildings, silos, a general store) plus a train stop. If questioned, people will obviously be frightened; if pressed, they will reveal that they are afraid of an Italian named Dante who was digging with his crew about five miles to the north. (This is a partial lie; Dante has already departed, though more of his crew *are* still at the dig site.) They will be happy to give them directions to the site.

The *real* reason the town is still frightened will be revealed if they press the matter too much; the Heroes will find themselves facing a number of Dante's gang equal to their own, emerging from farm houses and small shops. This encounter should be dramatic but brief, with an emphasis placed on complications appropriate to a small farming community (foes hiding in cornfields, a battle in a barn); again, complications tailored to the abilities of the Heroes are appropriate.

Once the town members are freed, they will still be reluctant to help if the gang at the site (see below) is still around. They will reveal their reasons for nervousness, in hopes that the Heroes will defeat them as well.

If the Heroes have already defeated the rest of Dante's gang (or if they haven't, but force the townsfolk to talk), they will reveal that Dante loaded a sheet-wrapped item aboard a freight car. It was narrow but about half as long as the car itself. The train left about an hour ago.

The Kensington Dig

It's possible for the Heroes to go to the dig site directly (if they have Jill) or from Kensington. The site is five miles north of Kensington by a small lake; in fact, the edges of the dig that border the lake are very wet, and not terribly strong. The dig itself is a hastily-dug pit about thirty feet wide by sixty feet long by ten feet deep, with several ladders descending vertically into it from the sides. The area around the dig shows many signs of heavy (but hasty) occupation.



A casual glance over the pit will not reveal much, except a mound near one corner of the lakeside edge; an active search will reveal, near the center of lakeside edge, another engraved stone, similar to the Kensington stone. It is buried and will take several minutes to uncover and clean. If Jill is with the party, she can translate it, given a few minutes:

"This vessel is final home to Ottar, the jarl who led us on this voyage and keeper of the axe of Saint Olaf. Let he

who disturbs his rest, or the goods he departs with, die in shame as those who

Disadvantages:

Stubbornness
Insomniac

Skills:

Archaeology-16 (**Great**)
Dance-10 (**Mediocre**)
Driving-11 (**Mediocre**)
First Aid-14 (**Good**)
Guns (Pistol)-12 (**Fair**)
History-13 (**Fair**)
Karate-10 (**Mediocre**)
Languages: 15 points of various languages
Piloting-12 (**Mediocre**)
Writing-12 (**Fair**)

Quirks:

Squeamishness
Doesn't like to sleep for fear she's "missing something"
Doesn't care what others think about her
Mildly curious
Likes to dance when happy or excited

Body 5 Mind 8 Soul 7

Attributes

Appearance -- 4, Art of Distraction -- 2 (3 with Appearance), Highly Skilled -- 2

Magical Powers

Sixth Sense: Danger

Defects

Unique Character Defect: Insomnia

Skills

Cultural Arts (Archeology, History) -- 3, Linguistics -- 3, Medical (First Aid) -- 1, Piloting -- 2, Driving -- 1, Gun Combat -- 1, Unarmed Attack -- 1, Unarmed Defense -- 1

would die in it in honor."

Jill will recognize this as a curse of some sort, but will be unable to comment as to the nature of it.

Uncovering the mound in the corner will reveal a body; Jill is able to recognize it as the body of Philip.

At the point where both items of interest are revealed within the pit, the trap is sprung.

A rope, tied to a support buried within the lakeside edge of the pit and buried under a layer of dirt, is pulled by more of Dante's gang members outside the pit. The Heroes will have but a moment to react; they can cut/shoot the rope, grab the rope and pull back, or try to get out of the pit.

If they fail, or don't react properly, then the support pulls away, revealing the side of the lake. The pit quickly fills up with water; quick action will be necessary to save Jill (if she is there) and themselves. But the gang members (again, in equal numbers to the Heroes) will press their advantage, shooting at them or otherwise trying to hit them while they are floundering in the water. They will get into position from their hiding places around the site to standing on the edge of the (possibly water-filled) pit.

After a difficult battle (assuming the Heroes win), the Heroes can either go back to Kensington (if they haven't been there), or try to chase after Dante (if they know how he escaped).

Unfortunately the car they've rented will not be up to the challenge of chasing a train. Fortunately fate provides help in the form of Dante's gang's motorcycles: BMW R.12s, equal in number to the gang (and the Heroes). They will either need to double-up one person or leave someone behind; Jill will, again, grumble at the prospect of being left behind.

Although challenging to drive (especially if the Heroes haven't driven motorcycles before) these will be able to go 80 miles an hour . . . more than enough to catch up with Dante's train. (If they chose to go by car, they will probably either need phenomenal driving abilities or a gadgeteer to make their car go faster.)

The Train Chase

Dante will have about an hour's head start on the Heroes; fortunately, since the Heroes can travel at twice the train's speed on motorcycles, it will only take about an hour to catch up with him. Dante's train, the Soo Line #2719, is currently carrying seven cars (not counting the engine): a passenger car, two freight cars, two more passenger cars, one more freight car, and the caboose. (The second set of passenger cars and the cargo car will be transferred to a new train in Minneapolis; they are on their way, ultimately, to Eau Claire.)

The #2719 is headed non-stop through to Minneapolis; it will reach that city in an hour, and the Heroes may be tempted to wait for Dante there.

But there's a snag: the curse which Jill may (or may not) have alerted the Heroes to has started to occur.

Generic Gang Member

ST: 10 (*Mediocre*)

DX: 11 (*Mediocre*)

IQ: 9 (*Mediocre*)

HT: 11 (*Mediocre*)

Speed: 5.5; **Move:** 5

Dodge: 5; light leather jacket (PD1/DR1), no encumbrance.

Advantages:

Toughness (DR1), or
or Combat Reflexes

Disadvantages:

Various

Skills:

Brawling-12 (*Fair*)

Guns (Pistol)-12 (*Fair*)

Stealth-10 (*Mediocre*)

Body 4 Mind 3 Soul 4

Skills

Gun Combat -- 2, Unarmed

Attack -- 2, Unarmed

Defense -- 1

Dante della Griva

ST: 11 (*Mediocre*)

DX: 13 (*Good*)

IQ: 13 (*Good*)

HT: 12 (*Fair*)

Speed: 6.25; **Move:** 6

Dodge: 6; light leather jacket (PD1/DR1), no encumbrance.

Advantages:

Strong Will +1

Wealthy

The second cargo car is currently the holding place of a Viking drakkar, a raiding longship that was constructed as a burial vessel for Ottar the Bold, leader of the ill-fated group of Swedes and Norwegians who explored the American Midwest before Columbus. This ship was originally constructed to be destroyed as other Viking burial vessels -- by fire. Unfortunately, unseasonable flooding kept them from doing this, and they were forced to bury the ship; they marked the ship with the stone described above; Dante, not knowing (nor caring) about the Viking runes, is claiming the treasure for its value. He *has* found the axe of Saint Olaf, and is guarding it (and the ship) within the freight car.

The curse on the ship has activated, and the ship has begun to smolder. It will shortly be consumed in flames, and threatens to take the train with it. The Heroes should be able to detect smoke coming out of the side of the car; it falls to them to be heroic and figure out a way aboard the train and the freight car, where they will find Dante.

Unfortunately, Dante himself is currently under a curse. As a non-Nordic man wielding the axe of Saint Olaf, an all-consuming bloodlust and rage is possessing him. He will strike out blindly at the Heroes with the axe, ignoring the danger to himself or the train posed by the flaming ship. (GMs wishing for a more horrific campaign can say that each wound inflicted by the axe will instill a similar bloodlust and rage for a day, week, or even a month. In this case, a "warning" wound should clue the Heroes into the danger.) The rage will consume Dante until he is defeated or, more likely, disarmed of the axe. At that point he will try to escape by any means necessary to harass the Heroes again. As the flames consume the ship, at one point part of it should fall away, revealing a cache of buried goods, including an ominous-looking book . . . a book which is in grave danger as the flames lick all around it . . .

This is the big climactic battle; as many complications as appropriate or desired should be used here.

- There is probably another group of Hero-matching gang members aboard the train, making trouble. They could seek to uncouple the second group of passenger and freight cars, placing those cars in danger.
- A gang member could force the conductor to accelerate the train dangerously fast, either to get away from their pursuers or to distract the Heroes. If there are scientists or gadgeteers, the mechanism for stopping the acceleration could break, needing repair.
- As the drakkar is consumed in flames, other parts of the train could catch on fire. The flames will either need to be brought under control or the train stopped and evacuated.
- Perhaps the axe makes Dante cunning as well; if pressed he may escape and enter the passenger cars, threatening those inside.
- Jill may be endangered; perhaps she sprints in after the book and becomes trapped by flames, or is threatened by Dante or members of his gang.

Aftermath

Dante should be thwarted (and, in Cliffhangers tradition, die in a gruesome way or, perhaps ideally, escape to fight again). The book should be recovered. The train (or its passengers) should be saved. The grateful Jill should kiss someone.

Serendipity
Single-Minded
Alertness +1

Disadvantages:

Reputation: Unscrupulous
Archeologist -1
Cowardice
Intolerance
Overconfidence

Skills:

Acting-13 (**Fair**)
Anthropology-12 (**Fair**)
Archeology-17 (**Great**)
Brawling-14 (**Good**)
Detect Lies-12 (**Fair**)
Driving-13 (**Fair**)
Fast Talk-14 (**Good**)
First Aid-13 (**Fair**)
Gun-15 (**Good**)
History-13 (**Good**)
Leadership-13 (**Good**)
Piloting-12 (**Fair**)
Savoir-Faire-13 (**Fair**)
Streetwise-14 (**Good**)
Tactics-12 (**Fair**)

Skills:

Always makes sure his gun is loaded
Hates feeling powerless
Delusion: The world loves him as an archeologist
Wants to travel the globe (despite his intolerance)
Mildly paranoid

Body 7 Mind 8 Soul 7

Attributes

Flunkies -- 6, Highly Skilled
-- 4, Heightened Awareness
-- 1

Defects

Unique Character Defects:
Cowardly, Intolerant,
Overconfident

Skills

Unfortunately, this week's archeological find of the century is destroyed by fire. The dig sight has been flooded (if not during the encounter than afterwards by another of Dante's inimitable gang acting after the Heroes left). Philip is still dead. The axe is still valuable, but transporting it is problematic.

The Book

This oversized tome is written in an ancient, unknown tongue, except for the inside cover, which contains more Viking runes. Jill will translate these as: "We found this in a dark place 988. May it be known by future sons for the light it may bring." She won't have any idea theories about what it means. The book will appear to have been written long ago as pages, but bound more recently (comparatively speaking; probably around 800 AD).

If the players search the book, they will discover a curious bump along the binding. If they open it (probably needing a knife or the like), they will discover a key hidden in the binding.

University of California

Once they return to the University, Dr. Spires will be saddened to hear of Philip's death, but will be very interested in the book and the axe. He will tell the Heroes he needs time to learn what he can about the book. He will offer them lodging within San Francisco.

After a day, he will reveal whatever information about the book the Heroes didn't know before, and present them with (chemical) photocopies of the book and a copy of key (even if they hadn't discovered it before). He will again thank them, promise to keep in touch regarding his findings, and provide whatever a fair and just reward for the band of Heroes would be.

Fade to black.

Epilogue

Many interesting things can result from this adventure, making it quite suitable for continuing adventures:

- The Chicago mob now has reason to dislike the Heroes. How might they retaliate, especially if the Heroes are subpoenaed to appear at Francis "Frost" Palone's trial?
- If Dante della Griva escaped, who knows what troubles he can stir up? He'll *definitely* have a bone to pick with the Heroes . . .
- If any Heroes were inflicted with the axe's bloodlust, even a seemingly routine mission will become problematic until its effects wear off.
- The Axe of Saint Olaf could easily be stolen from the Museum of Anthropology, making for a very difficult time at the University of California.

And what of the mysterious book and key (and Dr. Spire's lovely daughter Jill)? Tune in next month for part two of *Around the World in 80 Thrills*.

Cultural Arts (Archeology, History) -- 4, Driving -- 1, Gun Combat -- 3, Intimidation -- 1, Medical (First Aid) -- 1, Piloting -- 1, Social Sciences (Anthropology) -- 1, Stealth -- 1, Unarmed Attack -- 2, Urban Tracking -- 2

The Axe of Saint Olaf

The axe does sw+4 damage (**Strength+2 damage**) and gives the wielder an Axe/Mace skill of DX+4 (or +4 to existing skill) when wielded, with a maximum skill of 19. (**In FUDGE, the axe gives the Axe skill at DX+2, or +2 to the existing Axe skill, maximum of Superb.**) It also gives the wielder Combat Reflexes, High Pain Threshold, Toughness (DR2), 4 Extra Hit Points, and Strong Will (+3).

It also curses the wielder with Berserk, Bloodlust, and Fanaticism (to converting or killing non-Christians).

Damage 10

Gives Melee Attack (axe) at 3 or +3 (maximum of 6) and Melee Defense (axe) at 1 or +1 (maximum of 6). Also Gives Unique Character Defects: Berserk, Bloodlust, and Fanaticism (to converting or killing non-Christians).

Links:

- The Kensington Stone and Vikings in Minnesota
<http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/keithngail/>
<http://www.uiowa.edu/~anthro/webcourse/lost/vikingbrf.html>
- The Soo Line
<http://sooline.railfan.net/index.html>
<http://www.2719.com/>
- The Model 80A-1
<http://www.skytamer.com/mystery/m199911.htm>

The Matochkin Earth Star

by Rik Kershaw-Moore

Art by the U.S. Department of Energy

ST: 4

DX: 2

IQ: 2

HT: 19/6

Move/Dodge: 1/0

PD/DR: 4/5

Damage: The contact poison does 4 dice damage and causes nausea followed by sudden paralysis. If the victim can make a successful HT roll, the 2 dice damage is taken as well as DX reduced by 5 for a day. The poison takes 2 rounds to take effect.

Reach: C

Size: 2

Weight: 270 lbs

Habitat: dark, moist areas

On October 30, 1961 at 11:32am Moscow time, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics detonated a massive 50-megaton atomic device over the Novaya Zemlya archipelago in the Arctic Ocean. In less than a second the energy releases exceeded the total power of all the explosives used during World War II, including the atomic bombs dropped on Japanese cities by the United States. The giant swirling mushroom cloud that followed rose over 40 miles into the sky while the atmospheric disturbance generated by the explosion orbited the earth three times. This super bomb had absolutely no significance as a military weapon but was designed instead to be a one-time demonstration of force in a superpower game of nuclear one-upmanship.

However, what Andrei Sakharov, the other designers of the super-bomb, and Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev failed to consider was the lasting effect that such a nuclear explosion would have on the environment. Particularly they failed to realise the effect the blast would have on one species of fungi; the Matochkin Earth Star (Gasteromycete Matochkini).

At ground zero on that fateful morning was a clump of almost mature Matochkin Earth Stars, and as it had been raining early in the day, the rays of the Earth Star had uncurled and the fruiting bodies were fully exposed when nuclear chaos rained from the skies.

Normal Earth Stars are relatives of the puffball fungus, whose fruiting bodies are stomach-shaped sacs, which are protected by a number of arms or rays that are folded over the body during dry weather, making the Earth Star look something like a pale yellow onion. However, once it rains, these arms uncurl forming a star shape, which has enough force to raise the fruiting body clear of the forest floor to a height of several inches.

After being exposed to the intense gamma radiation that followed the Russian super-bomb the genetic structure of the Matochkin Earth Stars was altered in a number of highly unusual and dramatic ways. First, the cells in the rays which

Creatures of the Night: The Matochkin Earth Star



lift the Earth star off the ground became more akin to muscle fibers which allowed the Matochkin Earth Stars more freedom of movement. Second, as a result of the radiation, the Matochkin Earth Stars began to grow bigger and bigger, until eventually their growth stabilized at around 4 feet in diameter. The surface of the Peridium (the outer covering of the Earth Star) is now covered in thousands of tiny tendrils that constantly writhe when wet, but will hang limp in dry weather. Each of these tendrils has at its tip a tiny blob of a highly lethal neuro-toxin that paralyses the victim's central nervous system; once exposed, victims suffocate to death. Finally, the Matochkin Earth Star has the aroma of rotting meat.

This gigantism means that the Matochkin Earth Stars can now launch its spores with even greater velocity than before. Usually the Matochkin Earth Star will release its spores towards the end of autumn with such velocity that the airfoil shaped spores are often recorded at altitudes in excess of 10,000 feet. Once in the atmosphere, the spores can glide for many thousands of miles before coming to earth. Once a spore has landed on a suitable spot, it will begin to germinate. Such spots are generally in damp areas with plenty of shade. At first the Matochkin Earth Star will grow as deep beneath ground as a mass of fibrous hyphae whilst it waits for winter to pass. Once winter has passed, the Matochkin Earth Star begins to put itself towards the surface.

Here it waits, attracting prey towards itself using the smell of rotting meat as a lure, killing anything it attracts with the deadly nerve toxins secreted by the tendrils. The Matochkin Earth Star then secretes a powerful digestive enzyme and sends out more hyphae to feed on the resulting compounds. It will take about a day for the Matochkin Earth Star to devour a carcass before it needs to move on. Matochkin Earth Stars only ever move at night, and they will always try to find quiet dark spots to make their new lair. Finally in late autumn, the Matochkin Earth Star will seek out high ground, from which it can discharge its spores.

The government of the USSR first became aware of the existence of the giant Matochkin Earth Stars in the spring of 1964 when an entire platoon of men were wiped out when they wandered into an area inhabited by three such specimens whilst on a night exercise in the Krasino. Since then the USSR has managed to keep their existence a secret. There is evidence to suggest that they have gone to a lot of trouble to make sure no one learns the truth about these bizarre fungi, including the setting up of a special task force to deal with the Matochkin Earth Star and its victims.

Any area that becomes the center of a Matochkin Earth Star infection is usually cordoned off while a detachment from the 12th Glavnoye Upravleniye Ministerstvo (12th GUMO) deals with the threat. The 12th GUMO is the Russian Nuclear arsenal defence unit, which can be considered to be equivalent in training and materiel to Spetsnaz (p. SO39).

12th GUMO are able to track the Matochkin Earth Star because it has a unique radioactive signature that can be tracked by satellite. This is why wherever a Matochkin Earth Star lands a 12th GUMO team is not far behind to help pick up the pieces.

Even today, following the collapse of communism and the fragmentation of the old USSR, this task force is still in evidence, and still dealing with Matochkin Earth Star infestations. The last truly serious outbreak was in 1992, when 193 people died during an infestation at the nuclear power plant in Voronezh.

While it is thought to be solely a Russian problem, there have been a number of incidents involving Matochkin Earth Stars in other European Countries including Poland, Romania, Switzerland, Italy and Ireland. So far there has only been a single reported case of Matochkin Earth Star anywhere in the United States. In 1973, a single Matochkin Earth Star spore landed in Bettles Field, Alaska.

Adventure Seeds

The Biological Weapon

The player's government has learnt about the existence of the Matochkin Earth Star and believes that it will make the perfect biological weapon. The characters are tasked with acquiring either a living specimen of the Matochkin Earth

Star or its spores so that they can be studied.

This mission will be doubly tough since not only will the characters need to be inserted into one of the most well protected and radioactive areas in the world, the Russian Nuclear test facility on Novaya Zemlya, but they will also have to deal with a huge number of hungry Matochkin Earth Stars.

The Presidium Incident

At 21:43 last night, person or persons unknown fired an RPG-11 anti-rocket into room 1013 of the Presidium Hotel in Washington D.C from an adjacent building. In the ensuing blaze, 11 guests died along with the occupant of room 1013: Dr. Yuri Kruglov, a visiting Mycologist from the Irkutsk State University, in Siberia.

Kruglov travelled to the west with the express intention of alerting the rest of the world to the dangers of the Matochkin Earth Star. He brought with him a fairly immature specimen, which he has deposited for safe keeping in the Arlington National Cemetery. Before he died he talked to a number of other scientists as well as members of the press. In every case he told them about the specimen he had brought with it, but only hinted as to its location.

The characters are all members of a law enforcement agency assigned to bring the killers to justice. They should quickly learn who Kruglov talked to and when they start to die as well it should be apparent that these people need to be protected from 12th GUMO who were sent to silence Kruglov. Then the body count begins to rise and the characters will find themselves facing the reality of a giant killer mushroom on the loose.

Death in Middle America

A single Matochkin Earth Star spore has been wafted into a small town in Idaho. Here in the ideal conditions needed to promote growth, the Matochkin Earth Star has germinated and is slowly decimating the town. The characters are all members of the local community trying to work out what is killing these people.

Shortly after the characters start to investigate these deaths, a research team from the Centre of Disease Control in Atlanta arrives to begin its investigation. These guys are really 12th GUMO come to sort out the problem. They have orders to kill anyone or anything that gets in their way, including the characters.

Experiments

I'm something of a mad scientist when it comes to my gaming.

Although there are many ideas I haven't tried (yet), there aren't too many ideas I've rejected out of hand. Cliffhangers, "You wake up and it was all a dream," starting in medias res, players running multiple characters, "Opening the laboratory cooler, you discover bodies that look identical to your own," and so on.

But whenever I *do* experiment, I try to do it for a reason. Unlike bad 3-D in a movie, if there isn't a reason to have the players swap characters, I generally avoid it. (Now, if they get hit by the mind transference ray . . .) Some experiments work. Some don't. (As foreshadowing, and tied in by an experiment that failed, I *do* have another of [Steven's Biggest GM Mistakes](#) coming up . . . although I will protest in advance that I don't believe this one was my fault, per se . . .)

Many of these experiments turn upon the conventions of roleplaying and storytelling; why does one adventure have to occur sequentially after another? Why do players (and characters) have to be given free will? Why can't players know how a game is going to end? Who says the players need to know what they're doing to have fun?

From these random thoughts (!) I've done:

- Flashback and flashforward adventures
- Pre-written scripts, often placing the heroes in awkward or dangerous situations
- Foreshadowing, either in-game ("The fortune-teller says . . .") or out of game ("Come back next week when a major character dies . . . and a hero is accused of it").
- Identity crises, making the players guess at the nature and situation of their characters (not unlike *Quantum Leap*).

Anyway, for those of you who haven't noticed, this week has something of an experiment for *Pyramid*. We're running a four-part Cliffhangers adventure called "Around the World in 80 Thrills." A new installment will be running once a month for the next four months, with a different author taking up each part . . . making this something of a "round robin" effort, too. Like my gaming experiments, this one stemmed out of thinking about bending the conventions of the magazine. In this case, I realized, "Wait a minute! Why *can't* I run a multi-part adventure? It's not like folks aren't going to be able to collect the back issues . . ."

We've striven to make each part of this adventure stand alone as much as possible (despite some fairly easily removed continuity elements), so that if one adventure doesn't appeal to you it doesn't make the whole series moot. In addition we've also tried to make it as useful as possible by including stats for a few game systems (*GURPS*, *FUDGE*, and *Big Eyes, Small Mouth*), and making it as generic as possible so that it can hopefully be ported over to other games without much effort.

As ever, your comments are welcome, either on the [message boards](#) or by an [email to me](#). In particular, let us know if you like the idea, hate the idea, like the implementation, hate the implementation, like the inclusion of lots of systems, hate the inclu- . . . you get the picture.

* * *

Now, if there's one thing I've learned from my madcap experimenting, sometimes the most surprising thing you can do is . . . the expected. The butler did it. The orphanage isn't saved. The woman peels off the bandages and she's hideous.

So, despite our self-professed "sweeps month," next week isn't going to have much of a theme, special event, or exciting occurrence, outside of a loose "vacation" idea. The vacation theme is foremost in my mind currently because, as I write this, I am five hours away from boarding a plane for my first vacation home in three years. (Don't worry; *Pyramid* will run . . . though I'm not sure I can promise that about my column . . .)

As an aside, I'm also going to be away from email and the message boards for a week and a half. Feel free to write or post, but please don't expect an immediate response from me. I'll be sleeping, watching *MST3K* tapes, and in general doing anything other than working a jillion hours a day. Woo-hoo!

* * *

The trouble with being a good writer is that you tend to be a *busy* writer . . . particularly if you've foolishly made your prowess known to others who want to shower you with money, affection, and power to get you to write for them. At least, that's my understanding. Which is my roundabout way of saying that Ken is too darn busy this week finishing other Secret Things to bestow his Illuminated Weirdness upon us. But he promises he'll be back next week . . . and in his absence, some mutant spore creatures have taken the opportunity to invade. Enjoy.

-- *Steven Marsh*

* * *

*Last week's answer: **Indiana Jones and the Tomb of the Templars**, back cover.*

(five stars) "Gifts Unafraid of Loud Noises (unlike most rabbits); Never Forgets a Scent; Strong Will; Night Vision"

Dork Tower!



Dork Tower!



Murphy's Rules



by John Kovalic

Murphy's Rules



Murphy's Rules



Pyramid Pick

Fluid Mechanics: Technology in the World of Blue Planet

Published by [Biohazard Games](#)

Written by Jeffrey Barber, Greg Benage,
Greg Porter, Brian Schoner, and Jason
Werner



128 pages, hardbound; \$23.95

Fluid Mechanics bills itself as a guide to technology in *Blue Planet*. If you translate that as "gun and toy catalog," think again. The book includes some toys, sure, but more than that it looks at how technology affects all aspects of life in the *Blue Planet* universe. So while *Fluid Mechanics* details diamond machetes, it devotes equal space to wetsuits and an essay on fusion reactors in 2199. The technology is divided into four broad chapters: "Hardware," "Weapons," "Biotech," and "Vehicles."

"Hardware," the longest chapter in the book at 40 pages, covers an amazing assortment of material. It starts with a general overview of technology on Poseidon, then moves into power sources and tools, sensors, materials such as diamond glazing and body armor, computers, espionage gadgets, medical equipment, survival gear, and cetacean hardware -- plus many other topics. In short, there's a lot of stuff crammed into this chapter.

For example, the Computers section begins with a page forecasting the integration of computers into everyday appliances and their resulting standardization, the use of optical chips and DNA-based memory, and the way Commcore, a futuristic Internet, has led to a distributed computing network, where users rent most processing power and applications they need. This is followed by a description of the general types of software available--basic things like encryption, analysis, and navigation software, but also more interesting ideas such as a personal network that allows all the character's equipment to act in unison. Many other sections of *Fluid Mechanics* also include bits about tying gear, such as sensors into a computer network.

The next chapter, "Weapons," is the shortest chapter in the book. Again, it starts by summarizing the advances in firearms, military support weapons, their manufacturers, and R&D. In *Blue Planet*, little has changed in basic technology, but continual refinement and cybernetic targeting have made weapons deadlier than ever. Each type of weapon gets a few specific models that are similar to the generic guns listed in the Player's Guide. SASERs are introduced as weapons which concentrate sound and are highly effective underwater, although much less so above it. Several flavors of ammunition are introduced, of varying levels of legality. No PC's kit is complete without an adequate demolitions kit, which is followed by numerous grenades, mines, guided missiles, and a few other things characters probably shouldn't get their hands on. While not incredibly imaginative, the chapter does a good job of providing game statistics and flavor for most situations, as well as leaving space for other parts of the book.

The "Biotech" chapter hashes out the social ramifications and prejudices about cyberware (basically, it's too darn useful for people on Poseidon who are struggling to survive to be concerned about the ethical problems), damage to cyberware, and second-hand mods. It slips in a hodge-podge of new cyberware, from spacer limbs and plain vanilla cybereyes to "wakers" and reflex programs. So far, the chapter isn't much different than parts of *Shadowrun* or *Cyberpunk 2020*. The biotech section becomes much more interesting, with options as varied as third eyelids, bioluminescence for the fashion conscious, and perfect pitch. A section on complete genetic redesigns follows, mainly

talking about the history and hysteria over complete genetic redesign, but also presenting two new redesigns, the "Mongrel" hybrids and the "brainchildren," guaranteed geniuses with a manic-depressive personality. The chapter ends with a selection of biomods for cetaceans, although most prefer not to modify themselves.

"Vehicles," the final chapter, contains both vehicles and new rules for dogfighting. It adds two statistics to the basic ones listed in the *Player's Handbook*, "Power" and "Handling." While useful, no explanation is given for determining these statistics for vehicles from the basic books, and a few of the vehicles in *Fluid Mechanics* lack them as well! GMs who want to use the new rules system will have to guesstimate these two statistics for many vehicles, and, although it's not that difficult to do, it would have been better if Biohazard had included guidelines for vehicles from the main rulebook.

Anyway, there's nothing too atypical with the vehicles here; the chapter starts with a motorized tricycle only fit for newcomers to Poseidon, leads through hovercraft, jumpcraft, and VTOLs without anything too different than the *Player's Guide* except stats for the Jefferson Overland Hovertrain which services remote farms on Prime Meridian and a construction jumpcraft. Ground effect planes, airplanes which fly extremely close to the surface to increase their load and fuel efficiency, are introduced, then surface vehicles. The Hobart Class research corvette finally plugs the peculiar hole in *Blue Planet* in that there are no plain-vanilla boats in the game, the Trident Fast Assault Trimaran provides a new way for characters to hit the beach, and the ERT 14M Cutter can save the PCs when their plane goes down in the Storm Belt. Combat, research, and personal submarines each get a write-up, followed by a long and well-researched, though systemless section on space flight process, flight options, and the various spaceships. This is good stuff for the next time the PCs decide to go on a quick jaunt through the wormhole. Vehicle accessories, such as superchargers and chaff launchers, end the section. Any pilot jock will want to customize her vehicle, and now she can.

The dogfighting rules that end the book are well thought-out, although less numbers-based than *Blue Planet* fans might expect. Considering the basic rules give a scant page to vehicles, most players are going to want them. Encounters start at different range bands, from close to extreme, and characters can change the distance by making an opposed skill roll modified by the new "power" attribute. Maneuvers and evasive actions are handled in a similar fashion, although using the "handling" attribute. The rules are fairly comprehensive and simple enough to keep chases from turning into a war of graphing calculators. Although they probably ought to have been included in the basic book, the new rules work well and are a welcome addition to the game.

Fluid Mechanics is an excellent first supplement for the new version of *Blue Planet*. It is well-written and edited, with a variety of useful technology, from broad essays that add to the futuristic feel of *Blue Planet* to simple toys for the PCs or their opponents. The art continues to range from good to terrible; while most of the pen and watercolor pieces are well done, Biohazard has unfortunately abandoned the elegant wireframe look of the first edition technology for some rather crude drawings, especially of the vehicles. The book costs more than most supplements at \$24 for 128 pages, but it is also hardbound with a better, lay-flat binding than the main books, which makes up for the price increase.

Blue Planet fans will definitely want this book, if they don't already have it. Hard science fiction GMs for other games might want to consider picking up a copy of the book as well. It presents a viewpoint that doesn't have a radically different prediction of technology than most hard science fiction, but the side-effects and linkage of the various advances is very well thought out. Two problems with this are the focus on a water-world and the amount of *Blue Planet* rules-specific information in the "Weapons" and "Vehicle" chapters. Biohazard has written an excellent supplement to start their line. *Fluid Mechanics* is the best roleplaying tech book I own, and I'll buy every supplement in the line if they continue to be of this quality.

-- Andy Wills



by **Stephen Dedman**

We tend to look down on plants, despite the fact that they made this world liveable for oxygen-breathing animals like ourselves, and will probably be responsible for making other planets habitable. They may be at the bottom of the food chain, but they're not wimps; plants compete with each other just as animals do, and will go to great lengths not to be eaten until they've reproduced. Some endure for millennia, some survive in vacuum or thrive in extremes of heat and cold that would kill us in minutes, some grow to more than a hundred yards tall, some arm themselves with thorns or poisons, some have turned the tables and prey on animals . . . it's even been suggested that pollen from new varieties of plants poisoned the dinosaurs, leading to their extinction.

Plants that have enlivened science fiction include the stage trees and sunflowers from Larry Niven's "known space" stories, Leela's Janus thorns from *Doctor Who*, H.G. Wells's "strange orchid" and its descendants, Audrey II from *Little Shop of Horrors*, and John Wyndham's triffids. So next time your character is wandering through a generic forest on an unexplored planet, remember: the trees outnumber you, they can probably outlast you, they might outgun you, and they may already have outsmarted you.

The plants listed below are designed for *GURPS Space* campaigns; they may be native to alien worlds, mutated from terraforming fauna, or genetically engineered by the Precursors, according to taste. Plants described in *GURPS Bio-Tech* may also occur naturally on other worlds. Even the most dangerous species may persist on populated planets; apart from being hard to eradicate, they may provide ground cover (preventing erosion and dust storms), food (for humans or other species), drugs or medicine (likewise), area denial (smugglers, terrorists/rebels, and others who want natural or natural-looking barriers may surround their camps with razorsedge or similar plants), or have other uses that compensate for hazard they pose.

Bed-of-Nails

Known by different names on many worlds, mostly those with extreme seasonal conditions or very long nights, bed-of-nails is a sharp, spiky ground cover plant consisting of long sharp thorns thrusting out of a moss-like bed. It is difficult to eradicate, and plains of bed-of-nails can stretch for hundreds of miles, allowing almost no other plants to grow.

The thorns of a typical bed-of-nails do 1d-5 crushing damage per turn to anyone walking slowly (Move 1-2; minimum

damage 0, roll randomly for the foot injured) or 1d-4 impaling per turn to anyone running or jumping. The only ways to walk across bed-of-nails safely are to wear tough boots (the thorns will shred DR 1 soles in TL/2 hours), or to use Light Walk skill. Knocking someone to the ground on a bed of nails inflicts an extra 1d-1 cutting damage; the thorns cannot penetrate DR 2+, but can (for example) tear a spacesuit if the damage is bad enough.

- **Popweed** is another ground cover plant, but with gas-filled pods instead of thorns. These burst if trodden on; -2 to Stealth rolls. The only other hazard posed by popweed is that it can grow over swamps or narrow rivers as easily as solid land, but doesn't support much weight; treat as 1" ice (p. B188).
- **Viper Grass** resembles bed-of-nails, but the thorns are poison-tipped (usually Type H, doing 1d damage; see p. CII149). Fortunately, viper grass is much less common than bed-of-nails, and easier to keep at bay with other ground cover plants.

Some animals may be adapted to eating bed-of-nails, viper grass, and similar plants; most of these will have very large and tough mouths and hard hooves. If converting a grazing herbivore to this environment, add +1 to both biting and kicking damage.

Indicator Species

These plants reveal the location of something in the soil -- or the immediate future. Examples useful to humans include species that only grow in soils rich in certain minerals, or that change color in the presence of radioactive leaks. Other native plants may have their life-cycles cued to specific events -- e.g. flowers that bloom immediately before solar flares are due, distinctive seed-pods that appear before migratory animals arrive in an area, etc.

Industrial Plants

Humans have been making tools, buildings, vehicles and weapons of wood and bamboo since before the stone age. Some of these have required minimal work: making a club, for example, may be as simple as breaking off a branch; Australian lawyer vines resemble barbed wire; and most of us will have trodden on naturally occurring caltrops at some time. On other worlds, more complicated items may simply be plucked from the trees -- or *be* living trees, as with the Residential Tree from *GURPS Biotech* (p. BIO94). Many TL0 items might occur naturally on some planets, requiring only imagination to be put to use. Enormous seed pods might serve as bowls, bottles, helmets, canoes, or huts; clusters of nuts or fruit could be used as bolas; reeds might dry out and harden during summer to become serviceable arrows or spears (treat as fire-hardened tip) or transplanted to form a palisade. Three more examples are given below. Note that plants are more likely to grow to great size on planets with low gravity and hot, wet climates; plants from heavy worlds are likely to have tougher, denser wood, which makes better weapons. Naturally-occurring tools and weapons may help a near-intelligent species survive to evolve into a sentient race that can improve on these items.

- **Cacafuego:** Many plants are dangerous to burn because their smoke is poisonous, hallucinogenic, or otherwise noxious, but the Cacafuego qualifies for some sort of record. Cacafuego trees grow up to 10 (2d-2) yards tall, and are harmless except in conditions of extreme heat (200 F+), when their huge seed-pods explode like fragmentation grenades, doing 1d+2 concussion damage, 1d+1 fragmentation damage, and scattering their seeds far and wide. This normally happens only during thunderstorms and forest fires, but a stray shot from a laser, flamer or chemical slugthrower can set one off. A cacafuego pod that explodes on or near its tree has a 1 in 6 chance of detonating 1d more pods, which in turn can set off others in a chain reaction (the average tree bears 3d+1 pods). Turning a pod into an effective bomb requires only the application of heat (a fuse, a pyrokinetic attack, etc.) but they are heavier and bulkier than TL7+ grenades; 1/2D ST; Max STx2.5; Weight 2-3 lbs; Min ST 7. Cacafuego trees should be examined carefully before being used for firewood.

Cacafuego trees grow in warm rough areas where rain is uncommon and fires frequent, on planets with .7 to 1.1 G. They are rarely found within walking distance of human settlements, as they pose too great a temptation to children, drunks, and engineers. Cacafuego trees give any native culture that has developed fire (TL0+) a TL4 weapon.

- **Dagger Trees:** As the name suggests, these trees grow seed pods that can be picked and immediately used as cheap quality daggers. The "hilts" contain seeds, the "blades" are hard wood with a sharp point; there is no handguard. Windfall seed pods rot after 1d+3 days on the ground; the "hilt" of any "dagger" picked up from underneath a tree has a 2 in 3 chance of breaking in the user's hand, but the pod will still make an adequate throwing knife.

Dagger trees can grow up to 100 yards tall, and are found on worlds with .7 to 1.2 G and large, well-armored, not particularly bright animals (they are common on Cretaceous). Any impact that does more than 6 points of crushing damage to a dagger tree will cause it to drop "daggers," point down, in an attempt to send the attacker running with a few seeds sticking into its hide. Any 1-hex being standing under a dagger tree when the tree is damaged may be hit by a falling dagger for 1d-1 impaling damage (they can be dodged or blocked if the target is aware of the attack, but not parried except with Parry Missile Weapon skill). The chances of this is 1 in 6 for every 6 points of crushing damage done to the tree, with no more than 3 daggers falling in any given hex.

Dagger trees are frequently surrounded by small carnivorous plants (see below), or home to nests of swarming creatures that eat carrion or wounded prey (an equivalent of Terran army ants would be ideal). Their seeds are much prized by gourmets (a fresh pod is worth \$2-\$4, the seeds selling for \$100+/lb), making the slow-growing trees too valuable to fell. Dagger trees found near cities will usually be surrounded by fences.

- **Leatherbark:** As the name implies, the bark of these trees can be cut with sharp tools, peeled off, and used as armor with minimal preparation. A vest of leatherbark (TL0) has PD 1, DR 2 against most weapons, protects locations 9-11 and 17-18, and weighs 12 lbs; a helm has PD 1, DR 2, covers areas 3-5, and weighs 2 lbs. Against flamers, lasers, blasters, dragon breath, or flame jets, leatherbark is even more effective; PD 3, DR 8. As with ablative armor (p. UT29), every 4 hits a particular location stops reduces that location's DR by 1. PD drops to 2 when DR is reduced below 5, and to 1 when DR falls to 2. A slightly more advanced society (TL 2+) confronted by ultra-tech or magical weapons can make full suits of leatherbark armor, weighing 35-TL lbs.

Leatherbark trees are found on many worlds with extreme seasonal effects, including frequent thunderstorms and forest fires; only the oldest and largest trees have bark thick enough to be useful, keeping the price roughly equivalent to that of fur. Leatherbark with the properties of bioplas (p. UTII73) could also be genetically engineered, but you wouldn't want to live somewhere where it occurred naturally.

Razorsedge

Growing up to a hex high, razorsedge is long grass with a stiffening spine, a vicious saw-toothed edge, and intertwined roots. There are reports of razorsedge amputating human legs; treading on an exposed root can bring a blade (literally!) of grass around with the force of a machete, doing 1d cutting damage, plus 1 point of damage for every two hexes of movement. Chances of treading on a root in any turn are equal to the character's move on 2d.

Razorsedge grows in wet climates -- swamps and shores -- at .6 to 1.2 G, and if cut or burnt, grows back at a half-inch per hour of sunlight unless the roots are destroyed. Small swarming creatures that eat carrion or wounded prey often nest among razorsedge; it's a safe home for anything weighing less than 20 lbs. The ideal razorsedge-dweller would be an amphibious well-camouflaged snakelike scavenger with slow regrowth; ST 3, DX 13, IQ 3, HT 14/5; Speed/Dodge 4/7; PD 0/0. Individuals bite for 1d-5 crushing; treat a swarm as a swarm of rats (p. B143).

Razorsedge's color makes it invulnerable to blue-green lasers (p. UT37), crushing damage only flattens it temporarily, and it only burns at high temperatures (a plasma torch or hand flamer should do the trick). The flames only spread 1 hex for each die of damage -- slow enough for any inhabitants to flee. On planets where razorsedge is a problem, the job of clearing it is usually given to nanobots or to convict labor, depending on the society's TL and wealth.

Shotgrass and Gunroses

Shotgrass and gunroses are generic names for plants found on low-gravity worlds (.1 to .7G) that can spit their seeds with enough force to puncture a pressure tent or spacesuit. None of them resemble grass or roses, and most are large and easily recognized (and avoided), but their range in low gravity is frightening. Shotgrasses throw pellets, 1d cr. Damage; 1/2D 50; Max 300; RoF 1/4; Shots 3d+1. Gunroses spit thorns, 1d-1 Imp. Damage; 1/2D 100; Max 400; RoF 1/3; Shots 4d.

Stingweed

Stingweed are semi-intelligent carnivorous plants, with coiled tendrils that can lash out at a slowly moving target for 1d-4 cutting damage. This tendril also carries Type C venom (see p. CII147) that does 1d+2 damage if the sting hits breaks the skin or hits the eyes. Most varieties of stingweed have exotic flowers that attract insects and small birds (their preferred prey), but also human collectors. Claims that stingweed can target the eyes are unproven; they seem to rely on IR or sonar, and ignore anything moving faster than 2 hexes/turn, but anyone who tries to pick a stingweed flower is almost certain to be hit in the face.

Strange Fruit

Many otherwise harmless (and possibly useful) plants have fruit, berries or other parts that are poisonous, or simulate the effects of wonder drugs (though usually at low doses and with odd side effects). Moormelons, for example, provide a temporary cure for Acceleration Weakness, but are so sour that anyone who eats them suffers the No Sense of Smell/Taste disadvantage for the same length of time. Another example is Arden fruit; half a cup of the nectar lowers the eater's Will Rolls against seduction by -3 for an hour (1d+2 minutes to take effect), making it popular at parties and in singles bars, but consuming more requires a HT roll. Failing this roll causes nausea and localized itching (-2 to HT and DX) for 1d+2 hours; a Critical Fail leaves the eater ill for 24 hours (-4 to HT, -2 to DX, unable to eat or drink without vomiting).

While no one has found a fruit that gives knowledge of good and evil, hallucinogens are fairly common, some fruit may be addictive, and other effects can be imagined (e.g. fruit that temporarily causes Delicate Metabolism, Laziness, Nightmares, Paranoia, or Tourette's Syndrome). Some effects may be triggered only under certain circumstances (e.g. a fruit that causes Horrible Hangovers if the eater also consumes any alcohol). Similar effects may be caused by eating fungi, inhaling the smoke from burnt leaves or other parts of the plant, or inhaling pollens. Some effects may be selective, affecting only some individuals, or very slow acting, making the cause difficult to pin down.

Biochemical effects such as these are likely to be species-specific; an airborne pollen that causes Lecherousness and Overconfidence in humans may turn cattle or pigs into Berserkers and give Gormelites the symptoms of Malaria. Such effects may also be seasonal (particularly likely with pollen and fruit), and not noticed until long after a planet has been colonized.

GURPS Black Ops and *GURPS Atomic Horror* GMs should note that Earthly plants and pollens may have similarly strange effects on alien invaders.

Symbiotes

Plants that have a mutually beneficial arrangement with the animals they live in or on are common on Earth; without our intestinal flora (bacteria in our gut), for example, we would be unable to digest our food. Others include the fungi that give blowfish their venom (fugu, p. CII142), and the algae that grow on the tree sloth to camouflage it. Similar plants on other worlds may develop symbiotic relationships with imported animals; imagine the hazards posed by porcupines whose spines are tipped with curare, or leopards with the Chameleon advantage (p. C151). Other possible variants include:

- **Blue Genes:** A nickname for a form of cyanophyta (blue-green algae) that likes to live in fur. As well as giving the creature a bonus to Stealth in the appropriate environment (+1 to Stealth while moving, +2 while perfectly

still), it acts as Reflec armor against blue-green lasers. "Blue Genes" are most common in wet, cool, heavily vegetated environments: swamps, jungles and forests.

- **Hellmouth:** A fungus-like growth that lives on the underside of leaves, Hellmouth can also thrive in the mouth of a herbivorous or omnivorous creature with poor oral hygiene. It produces a toxin that can be ingested safely, but if injected, it acts as a venom -- usually type A doing 1d-1 damage (see p. CII147). Fortunately, the bite of creatures infected with Hellmouth usually does crushing damage; roll for venom effects if a bite breaks the skin. Hellmouth can also kill its host if it has a bleeding wound in its mouth.
- **Photosymbiotes:** First discovered in the tropical swamps of Summerskye, these single-celled algae also live in the skins of many of the planet's animals, enabling them to photosynthesize when food is short; they can also be safely absorbed by humans. They give the Decreased Life Support (breathe carbon dioxide rather than oxygen when sleeping, 10 points), Deep Sleeper (5 points) and Doesn't Eat or Drink (10 points) advantages; and the Dependency (lie naked in shallow nutrient-rich water and sunbathe for at least 8 hours; common, daily, -15 points) and Unnatural Feature (greenish skin, -5) disadvantages.

Trapweed

Common in jungles, swamps and dense forests on worlds with .5-1.1 G, trapweeds catch animals either to eat or to more thoroughly coat them with pollen or seeds (small animals that become stuck in non-carnivorous trapweeds lure in larger predators or scavengers, which then disperse the pollen or seeds). Anyone or anything stuck in a trapweed must win a contest of ST to escape; if they win by more than 5 points, the trapweed hasn't even broken their stride. Ignore trapweed with ST of 4- as no more than a nuisance, unless characters are trying to hurry across an area covered with it; however, trapweeds on worlds with very large animals can grow to 2' high with ST of up to 13. Some of these can only be triggered by creatures over a certain weight, or so slowly that a running man can get through them but create a hazard for any pursuers -- very useful for unencumbered PCs trying to escape large animals or heavily-armored opponents. Some trapweeds are phototropic, and will wrap themselves around anyone carrying a light (or firing a laser or weapon with muzzle-flash).

- **Carnivorous trapweeds** have weak digestive acids, doing 1d-5 damage (minimum 0) per hour, and pose almost no threat to uninjured adult humans. They can, however, help keep down the spread of rabbits, rats, feral cats, and similar vermin.
- **Jenny-Greenteeth** is a more dangerous aquatic form of carnivorous trapweed, growing up to 4 hexes high and with ST of 16-30, that kills by drowning its prey. It has small thorns that inject a Type D venom (p. CII148), but cannot penetrate DR 2+. It is most common in large, slow-moving rivers or coastal shallows, in warm to hot climates.
- **Startraps** are trapweed-like plants that are adapted to space. They resemble enormous water-lilies, some of them miles across but rarely more than an inch thick. The greenish "lily-pads" act as solar sails as well as gathering sunlight for photosynthesis; the "flowers" are sensory and digestive organs. Startraps mostly "eat" ice and carbonaceous asteroids, but they may also mistake bioships (pp. BIO106-110) for food. They pose no threat to an armed ship, and an unarmed one should be able to outrun or outmaneuver them, but if a startrap wraps itself around a damaged bioship, it can blind it and slowly digest its hull.
- **Stunflowers** are like Jenny-Greenteeth in most respects, but use an electric shock to paralyze prey instead of envenomed thorns.

Adventure Seeds

- **Black Roses:** Gunroses have been a minor problem on Montgolfier since it was settled, but human fatalities have been rare -- until a fruit-picker is killed by an envenomed thorn. Another dies a week later, and then another . . . is it a new species of gunrose, or a serial killer with a blowgun? One of the PCs may be the next victim . . . or a prime suspect.
- **Hell Week:** For many years, the agricultural world of Tlalocan has been plagued by outbreaks of apparently senseless murders. A xeno-botanist, Dr Lisa Fox, discovers that these outbreaks coincide with high pollen counts, and hires the PCs to take her to Tlalocan to gather more evidence. They stay in a small rural town where

a murder was recently committed; unfortunately, Dr Fox doesn't know that the pollen affects anyone with active or latent psi powers, including Danger Sense and Empathy -- and she has one level Healing power.

Those susceptible to the pollen seem normal while they're awake, but suffer from the Sleepwalking disadvantage -- and while sleepwalking, will attack anyone who caused them stress during their waking hours, as though they had the Bloodlust and Bad Temper disadvantages. The effects last for 18-HT nights.

- **Savage Garden:** The Botanical Gardens on Blaufeld are famous for their collection of dangerous plants -- cacafuegos, dagger trees, trapweeds, razorsedge, viper grass, and more -- as well as their aquarium, filled with equally dangerous aquatic animals. It's popular with xenobotanists, children, and organized crime figures -- and a great place for a climactic fight scene, especially after hours when the electric fences have been switched off.

Pyramid Review

The Foundation (for d20)

Produced by [Nightshift Games](#)



Written by Eric Metcalf, Michael Nunn, Dale Perkins,
Paul Arden Lidberg

Cover by Derrick Thomas

Illustrated by Kenneth Petersen, Phill Knicht, Michael Kasinger, Derrick Thomas, Johnny Mince, Michael Nunn

128 pages; \$19.95

The Foundation from Nightshift Games is an RPG that uses the d20 System of mechanics that powers *D&D 3rd Edition* from [Wizards of the Coast](#). This makes it our first look at a *d20* game that does not come from WotC, and our chance to see how the *d20* system works in a genre other than high fantasy or space opera.

The Foundation claims to be a *d20* game of Superheroics, providing a setting -- including the background and its heroes and villains, the rules for super-powered *d20*, and a novella detailing the origins of the setting. This setting is adapted from a series of short stories by the author, Eric Metcalf, about a team called the Guardians. These can be found at the author's website (http://members.tripod.com/Eric_metcalf). Much of the book is devoted to the background and the thirty or so heroes and villains. To be honest, the setting is somewhat run of the mill, and there is little here to grab the imagination in comparison with other superhero RPGs such as *Aberrant* or *Brave New World*.

Gamers coming to *The Foundation* after seeing the crisp layout and art of the third edition *D&D* books will be in for a disappointment. The layout appears rushed and slipshod, with many silly errors. The contents are done in grey tones, and lie behind a color cover which garishly depicts four characters from the book in un-dynamic poses. The internal artwork serves to showcase numerous characters again in un-dynamic poses, and is nothing to write home about. What few pieces of art that show the characters doing anything other than posing, such as fight scenes, are muddy and indistinct. None of the art invokes any sense of *The Foundation*'s setting and again, there is little here to grab the imagination.

The roster of characters does serve to showcase how a *d20* superhero game could work -- far better than the actual rules as written. The thirteen pages of new mechanics are actually the best thing in the book, although still flawed. Players create their superhero characters by choosing from one of three races, then selecting a class (*The Foundation* is, like *D&D*, a class and level game), powers, feats and skills, just as they do using the *Player's Handbook*. The races are ordinary humans, which get an extra feat; meta-humans, which have 1-4 powers; and aliens. This latter race is actually a catchall, as *The Foundation* details no new races, but suggests that the GM and player agree upon the nature of the race the player wishes to have. Aliens receive one or more innate powers, which must be agreed upon during character generation.

The Foundation takes the staple character types of superhero comics and employs them as classes, both old and new. The new classes are Brick, Energy Projector, Gadgeteer, and Mentalist. The Combat Artist replaces *D&D*'s Fighter, and the Martial Artist replaces the Monk, but the Rogue, Sorcerer, and Wizard classes are ported over from *D&D* without any change. Powers in *The Foundation* work as a sub-class of Feats, and the game gives a list of forty

Superpowers and nine Mental Powers. All of the Powers are given a simple description, and many of them work exactly some of the spells in the *PHB*. There are new Feats and skills to reflect the modern setting of the game, and also updates of existing Feats to reflect this. Unlike many other superhero RPGs, there are no disadvantages or modifications given that can be applied to characters; to my mind this reflects poorly upon the genre that *The Foundation* is trying to model. Finally, the book gives an example of a starting character for each class.

Character generation is relatively easy, but you need constant reference to the *PHB*, as the book contains no guidelines whatsoever on how to create a character. Nor is an example of character generation given. A simple list would have sufficed, but is wholly absent. It may now be found on Nightshift's website (<http://www.teamfrog.com/oglsupers.htm>), but the fact that it is not in the book is inexplicable. Also absent are any rules on running the game from scene to scene, on running superhero combat, awarding experience points suitable to the genre or a list of modern equipment (one NPC is equipped with an SMG, so where are the stats for it?). Considering that the actual rules as described only take up thirteen pages of this 128-page book, what is in the rest of *The Foundation*?

There are five pages of advice for the GM on running the setting of *The Foundation* and writing adventures for it. It is decent, if scant, material. This is followed by two short adventures. The first, "Breakout At Para-Max One!" has the players dealing with a breakout at the prison where all the supervillains are incarcerated, and is just an excuse for a fight. The second, "Arcanus Strikes Back -- Again!" has the players facing the game's major mystic villain. It is a little more involved, requiring some investigation and roleplaying. While Arcanus' details can be found elsewhere in *The Foundation*, his henchman left for the GM to create, but again there are no suggestions given for this.

The rest of this book pretty much consists of a roster of the heroes and villains. These do show how a *d20* system can model such characters, but I'm not sure that it was necessary for either a player or a GM to know what the vital statistics are for some of the more buxom female characters. (I personally found the inclusion of these details quite tasteless.) This also reflects a problem I have with the novella at the back of the book, which take up a whole 30% of the contents of *The Foundation*. Not only can this novella be found on the author's website, but it deals with adult themes as well. On the website, there is an "over 18 only" warning, but this is absent in the book. The fiction as written also fails to inspire, and considering that I can download for free from the Internet, I do feel that I am being shortchanged here.

I'm not someone who likes to be wholly critical of a new book, but over all, I am stunned by the mediocrity of *The Foundation*. It feels rushed and very undeveloped. It devotes the majority of its contents to an uninteresting setting, where it should have been developing the rules and helping both player and GM get the feel of the genre. It does none of that. Yet at the core of *The Foundation* are thirteen pages of rules with which an experienced GM could run, not a *d20* superhero game, but a *D&D* game in the superhero genre, as it relies upon both the classes and spells to be found in the *PHB*. Further, this not a game as it describes itself, but a superhero supplement for *D&D*, and an exciting one at that.

Should anyone be buying *The Foundation*? If you like Eric Metcalf's fiction, or really (and I mean really) want to have a *D&D* superhero game right this minute, then this book might be of interest to you. Otherwise, I can honestly recommend that you steer clear of *The Foundation* and wait for WotC to publish their own superhero *d20* RPG.

-- Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

SOPAC: The Solomons Campaign Wargame

Published by [Avalanche Press](#)



210 one-inch counters, 140 half-inch counters, two hard mounted game boards, rulebook, scenario book with 20+ scenarios; \$49.95

Avalanche Press has been releasing games for its *Great War at Sea* for years. So far they have managed to cover the First World War in two volumes, the Russo-Japanese War, and two speculative campaigns in the Caribbean and the Pacific, between the Americans, Germans, and Japanese respectively. All of these games are strategic, in the sense that they cover specific battles, and tactical in that you can fight specific engagements within the overall battle. The games are not strategic in the sense that you are able to fight an overall campaign, with each individual battle affecting other engagements down the road.

"SOPAC: Naval Action in the South Pacific: 1942-1943" is the first game in a new series, "Second World War at Sea," and it is a doozy. The box includes 210 one inch counters (with side views on one side, and top views on the other of the ships involved), 140 1/2-inch counters (including planes, and various information counters), an 11x17 hard mounted strategic map (covering part of New Guinea, and Guadalcanal), an 11x17 hard mounted tactical map, 24 pages of rules, a 28-page scenario book (10 tactical battle scenarios and 10 operational scenarios), one cardstock sheet of tables, 10 pages of ship information, two task force cards, two airbase cards, and a player's log sheet. The log sheet, and appropriate ship information sheets, will have to be photocopied in order for play to proceed.

In this game the fog of war is maintained by the player log sheets. At the beginning of an operational scenario the player must divide her ships into task forces, and assign a mission to each task force. Some of the mission types are bombardment, transport, and intercept. All movement for bombardment and transport must be preplotted through the end of the scenario; intercept forces are allowed to be plotted one turn in advance. This means that you must plan ahead, and be acclimated to the fact that your opponent may not be exactly where you expect them to be. Contact occurs through air searches, and when task forces pass through the same squares on the board.

Combat is handled on the tactical board, and it is very simple to run. Each ship is able to roll a number of dice equal to its gun factors at a ship that is within range. If the other ship is hit, then the weight of the shell (whether or not it is from a primary or tertiary battery) determines whether or not it is able to pierce the armor of the other ship. Torpedo combat is held somewhat differently, in that they do damage to whatever they hit. This gives even little destroyers a chance to damage the big boys, if they don't go down first. There is some recordkeeping involved in combat, and not all of the relevant information is on the counter. But overall I would say that combat is effectively done, and is somewhat fast moving; this allows for larger battles to be fought in an acceptable time frame.

I would have liked to have seen some campaign rules to link the operational scenarios together. It would also have been nice to have a design-it-yourself scenario section that would give point values for the combatants involved, and allow players to create their own scenarios. There is also a lot of plotting that must be done for the larger operational scenarios.

This game does not have a lot of tactical polish, and sometimes it does seem to be a bit simple on the tactical board. Units move, fire, move again, and so on. Movement is not used to "cross the T," but is essentially used to just maintain range. The game also lacks some elements which would be nice to have in a strategic game. Where the game excels though, is in the sheer variety of ships and aircraft involved. The tactical rules may seem simplistic, but the differences between the various ships will eventually make themselves felt. So when you play this game you will get more of a sense of what it was like to be commanding these specific ships into battle.

SOPAC is definitely worth what I paid for it. Not so much for the individual game itself, but for the series from which it is derived. Now I can play around with modern Japanese battle ships, and American sea going Zeppelins! There are many games out there, which give more complete portraits of the battles for the Solomon Islands, but precious few that will allow you to bring ships together from the Second World War and beyond.

-- *Scott Shafer*

Pyramid Review

NeMoren's Vault (for d20)

Published by [Fiery Dragon Products](#)



Written by James Bell

32 pages; \$9.95

NeMoren's Vault starts with an uncomplicated plot. The characters, at one point or another prior to the module, inherit a silver key. The key is an invitation to explore the vault of the NeMoren family. Players battle undead, hobgoblins, and the unique Undrathar, an ancestor of the Umber Hulk. The section detailing the aftermath of the adventure allows GMs to weave further stories based on the events of the module.

The adventure is balanced in terms of the players' strength against the enemy. The only thing that can overshadow game balance is the high amount of treasure that can be found within the Vault. There is one room, sealed by an earthquake, which houses over twenty five thousand gold pieces. One of the first rooms has a tree with leaves of elfish brass. Each leaf is worth four gold pieces, with five hundred leaves to a tree. Your only hope as a GM is that players don't think to take it, or that you rule the value fades as the leaves are taken off the tree.

Outside of the adventure, there are color counters. They can be cut up and used in place of miniatures. This is a great aid to those still working out the kinks of Attacks of Opportunity and determining whom the fireballs hit. In addition, there are two pages of color handouts. On the back side of the handouts are grid maps, suitable for copying for use in game play.

Another important asset in *NeMoren's Vault* are the Runes of Passage. This allows the user access to the password protected part of the Fiery Dragon website. Unfortunately, there isn't much there now. Currently, the evolution of the cover, some PDF versions of tetranitrate characters, information on rune swords, and the promise of an extra adventure, coming in February, that ties into the module. For now, the Runes are better than mere errata and a single magic item, but final judgment must wait until the extended adventure is posted.

Lastly, there are pregenerated 2nd level characters. On one hand, these are useful tools to get players right into the game. On the other, players may not want pregenerated characters. Still, they can be a lifesaver for players in a hurry, and at worst, a crafty GM can use them as NPCs.

The cover is too bright and the art is not to my taste . . . it's a little too cartoon-like. The illustration on the back cover shows the style of the interior art, all done by the same artist. The book's lay out is excellent. The interior covers are used. The first one is used to show challenge ratings. This is handy for new GMs who are uncertain what CRs traps and obstacles should have. Unfortunately, the interior back page is information about Fiery Dragon. Still, I'd prefer it on the inside cover than the adventure itself. There is a one-inch margin for top and bottom, and a half-inch margin for the outer edge. Material for the GM to read aloud is separated from other information through a gray background, and extra information is boxed off. Monsters and magic items are put in the appendix, allowing more space to be used for the module itself. Last, the legal text (e.g. the Open Game License and D20 System Trademark License) are both put on one page. In my opinion, a vital element for any *d20* module is that this information take up as little space as possible. There should never be a module that uses two or more pages to reprint this information.

The price may seem high since several other *d20* adventures, like *Death in Freeport*, are \$8.99 or lower, but the color inserts and computer support are nice touches, and worth the extra dollar . . . especially if and when the web support kicks over into high gear.

NeMoren's Vault is a good first level module that players might not have seen yet, and can put even the greenest players on friendly terms with 3rd edition in no time.

(*Reviewer's Note:* The Fiery Dragon web site, <http://www.fierydragon.com/>, has more information on the company, their products, and the Runes of Passage.)

-- *Joe G. Kushner*



by Matt Riggsby

It seems too mundane to consider at first. What do adventurers eat? Who cares! Let's go hit something! However, by overlooking food, one overlooks a universal aspect of life. Food is an everyday necessity, a means of identifying people and societies, a comfort in hard times, a symbol of wealth, and a tool for power. Properly described, food can also be used to engage the interest of players as well as characters.

Presenting Food

One way of engaging players' interest in a campaign is to contrive a "feel" for the world, an identifiable look (provided by distinctive clothing, geography, or architecture) or sound (with, say, dialects or music). Far less common, though, is the use of descriptions of the campaign world's distinctive food and drink. This is a pity, since, properly handled, it can be an effective way of grabbing players' attention. A good description of a special dish or an exotic spice will appeal not just to the visual imagination, but to the senses of taste and smell as well.



Many of us have stopped to look longingly into a bakery window at an elaborate cake or paused while channel-surfing to watch somebody on a cooking show effortlessly execute a nearly impossible dish. Now, imagine bringing that feeling to your next roleplaying session. Your players may appreciate your sketch of the grand palace or marvel at your eloquent use of an obscure orcish dialect, but if you can make their mouths water with the description of a tureen of rich, simmering dill-lentil soup melded with a lamb broth, or perhaps a simple cooling drink redolent with the aroma of cardamom and mace, you will have effected them physically as well as intellectually. It is, perhaps, a small thing, but it will certainly help your players submerge themselves in your world.

"Artistic" considerations aside, some consideration of food and drink can lead to opportunities and complications for PCs. PC generals might be forced to deal with the fact that an army travels on its stomach. Spacefarers are entirely dependent on the resources they carry with them, and may need to take extreme measures to replenish their supplies or repair food synthesizers. The spice trade was a major factor in historical trade, and PC merchants may use it as a means to get rich quick. Moreover, food and drink have great social and symbolic importance in many societies, from taking bread and salt from a host to buying people drinks in order to get close to them.

What There Is To Eat

Hunter-gatherers may not prepare food as elaborately as those at higher levels of technology, but they exploit a wider range of food species: berries, roots, nuts and seeds, edible fungus, fruits and vegetables, leaf plants, insects, fish and shellfish, and animals ranging from mid-sized rodents and birds to the largest creatures they find, including mammoths and whales. Without agriculture, advanced food preservation techniques, and the capability to carry large food stores, they must rely on anything edible and in season. Most foods will be roasted in or over a fire, but entrails and hollow wooden tubes, plugged at both ends and thrust into or held over the fire, make excellent one-

use cooking vessels for steaming and boiling. Some societies boiled foods by heating rocks in a fire, then dusting the ashes off and dropping them into tightly woven baskets along with the food itself. Smoking and air-drying are sometimes used for preservation.

With the rise of agriculture, the number of species exploited for food drops sharply. Many herbs, fungi, fruits, nuts, and wild animal species may be used for flavor or a few extra calories, but a handful of domesticated animals and grains (supplemented by tubers or beans) provides the bulk of caloric intake. Early farmers make unwitting use of naturally occurring yeast to leaven bread and ferment wine and beer. New food preservation techniques are developed, such as cheese-making, pickling, and storing in sealed ceramic pots, the distant forerunner of modern canning.

New technologies also lead to new cooking techniques. Sedentary farmers can build permanent ovens (typically free-standing domes built from mud brick or ceramic tile). Increased availability of fats (animal fat, vegetable oils, butter) leads to more frying techniques. Metal cooking tools, which are far more durable than wooden and ceramic cooking tools, also give greater control over heat.

Perhaps as a result of those two developments, what early agriculturalists' diets lack in diversity of food species, they make up for in elaborate preparation. With some creative treatment, grains may be turned into sprouts (sprouted seeds were an source of vitamins in many societies, including Medieval Europe), noodles, breads and crackers, porridge, alcoholic beverages, and flavorful fermented sauces and pastes. Likewise, milk can be turned into yogurt, butter, or cheeses. Most foods can be pickled, both preserving them and giving them additional flavor. Less common ingredients, such as herbs, pungent vegetables and preserved (usually smoked and salted) meats, can be used in small quantities, imbuing plain dishes with a broad range of flavors.

Geography and related resources may have a profound effect on ingredients, cooking, and storage techniques. People living by oceans, lakes, or rivers are, of course, able to add fish and water plants to their diet relatively regularly. Societies in tundra environments may preserve food by hanging it until the cold, dry winds have sucked the moisture from it or hack a pit into the permafrost to act like a natural refrigerator, while societies in warmer societies must smoke foods or seal them away. If fuel is in short supply (as, for example, in China), cooking is likely to be quick frying or searing, using a minimum of fuel, while societies with more fuel can develop more leisurely simmering, roasting, and baking techniques.

The industrial age sees a number of developments in cooking technology. Iron stoves and gas burners provide more even and easily controlled heating surfaces than open fires, an effect compounded by the development of thermostats and cheap timers. Iceboxes (supplanted by electric refrigerators) preserve food without extensive processing, and chemical preservatives allow foods to be stored even longer. Artificial cooling also allows more extensive use of chilled ingredients, a necessity for some cooking techniques (a variety of tasks from whipping cream to preparing good puff pastry) and iced dishes (syrup-flavored snow is at least as old as the Romans, but true ice cream is a coal-age invention).

Chemical leavening agents like baking soda also appear, so many yeast-free baked goods begin to take on their modern forms. Electric mixers and blenders allow cooks to prepare in minutes dishes that would have taken hours a century earlier. Microwave ovens allow faster heating, although many "traditional" dishes cannot be made properly in a microwave and a body of recipes specifically for the microwave oven is only slowly developing.

Another by-product of increasing technology is a wider range of available ingredients and dishes. Better transportation and communication mean that foods traditionally found in widely separated areas can be combined to provide new dishes. For example, potatoes and tomatoes, both New World crops, have been thoroughly incorporated into many Old World cuisines. Just about any modern city is likely to have restaurants serving at least a few varieties of Asian and European foods. If a star-spanning empire's subjects have more-or-less compatible biological requirements, adventurers might eat dinner at a Little Green Man restaurant (several Star Trek episodes feature characters enjoying alien cuisine).

Early space dwellers are likely to be vegetarians by necessity, or at least return to treating meat as a rare treat. Space and life support will be at a premium and food animals compete with human crew for resources, while plants and microorganisms can process organic waste and turn carbon dioxide back into oxygen, becoming a contributing part of an ecosystem. As soon as they can grow food rather than carry prepared rations, space dwellers might tend hydroponic gardens or, perhaps more efficiently, vats of edible yeast and algae. These "crops" can be genetically engineered to ensure proper levels of vitamins and proteins in the diet and even to adjust flavor, although they'll require constant tending to weed out foul-tasting mutant strains and synthetic foods will probably be an acquired taste. With sufficient genetic engineering, animal cells might be altered to provide sheets of vat-grown flesh without the space and resources necessary to keep entire animals. The same technology could be used to feed overcrowded cities.

At some point, it may become possible to feed nutrients directly into the bloodstream. Combined with a computer and bio-monitoring equipment, a drip could adjust nutrient intake for maximum efficiency, manipulating blood sugar levels to prevent hunger or adding more salt and water to the blood in high heat to replace sweat losses. The user would simply plug nutrient cartridges into an implanted feed every few days. Such a system could greatly reduce the risk of a number of diet-related illnesses like high blood pressure and hardening of the arteries. Eating could be eliminated altogether, although only religious extremists and the heavily engineered are likely to forego the pleasures of the table. However, long-term space travelers may find it practical to switch to less bulky "food serum" to reduce the volume and mass given over to food storage. Perhaps, in a heavily cyborged society, eating would become a wildly popular hobby, but not a necessity.

Religion and social mores affect diet considerably. Particular species may be avoided because of they are considered either too sacred or too profane to eat. Jews and Muslims avoid pork for religious reasons, Catholics and Orthodox Christians are periodically prohibited from eating meat, and most Hindus let what others might regard as perfectly good beef cattle alone. A few religions or societal traditions may restrict the use of some foods to special occasions. A tribe worshipping, say, the heron spirit may avoid herons most of the time, but hunt them for initiation feasts so that the initiates may "become one" with the tribe's totem.

However, ideological rules need not be present to prevent some foods from being eaten. Some perfectly edible foods may be avoided because society regards them as inedible. For example, it would be almost inconceivable for a European to serve rats or dogs, while an Asian might react to cheese or yogurt with equal distaste, regarding them as sour milk gone extremely bad, and both would look askance at the African consumption of grubs and grasshoppers. Serving such a dish can provoke a very strong negative reaction, and even a hungry man might hesitate to eat bizarre and unfamiliar foods (see *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*). Low-tech adventurers are particularly susceptible to this kind of problem, since most ancient diets were fairly monotonous. Characters who are used to eating the same things on an almost daily basis are likely to be more skeptical about unfamiliar foods than people in the modern industrialized world, who often have access to cuisines from all over the world.

Nevertheless, people have gone to considerable effort to turn borderline-inedible foods into delicacies and even staples. For example, acorns, an important food for some Native American groups, are bitter and somewhat toxic unless soaked for long periods.

Eating Meals

The number and size of meals can vary widely from society to society. The evening meal is often the largest although, as in hunter-gatherer societies, there may be constant snacking through the day. This may be because evening meals

are often more socially important. Guests are most often entertained during the evening meal, and celebratory feasts are most often held in the evening, perhaps because such meals can run long without using up valuable daylight hours and cooks have more daylight to prepare. Peasants may put more emphasis on a mid-day meal to give them more strength to do hard work during the day. Morning meals are often very light, perhaps no more than a bit of bread or a small bowl of gruel, but may be followed by a more substantial "second breakfast" mid-morning. The poor may have only one major meal per day, while the rich may eat five or six meals a day, most of which will be little more than formalized snacks, like an English tea or a Continental breakfast. Lighter and less formal meals usually have everything served at once and eaten in any order the diners see fit. Larger and more formal meals may have a definite order such as appetizer-main course-dessert or alternating sweet and salty or hot and cold dishes.

Adventurers may find themselves faced with the unexpected challenge of unfamiliar eating utensils and table manners. Every society will have its own etiquette governing how to eat particular foods, when to begin and end eating, what hands may be used for, when toasts are appropriate, and so on. For example, foods are eaten with the hands from communal dishes at feasts in the Islamic world. Everyone touches everybody else's food, so cleanliness and use of the right hand are very important. In Medieval European feasts, a diner is often expected to share a cup, plate (or trencher of bread), and perhaps utensils with his neighbor. Strange table manners will cause at least a few moments of anxiety the first time characters sit down to a meal in a distant land and may lead to serious embarrassment, especially if they have particularly fastidious tablemates. The GM may make appropriate skill or other social situation rolls the first time a character attempts to eat an unfamiliar food or use unfamiliar utensils (for example, a Westerner trying to use chopsticks for the first time, or an Asian learning to eat spaghetti with a fork) in a formal setting to avoid making an embarrassing mess. This embarrassment may be mild (causing muffled titters around the table) or severe (inadvertently mortally offending the host and thereby coming close to blows) depending on how badly the roll was missed. Communal meals at noble courts are likely to have elaborate protocols dictating who sits where, and characters involved in political intrigues may spend time jockeying for a better position at the dinner table.

Where To Eat

Most eating is done at home, but adventurers will often have to find a table elsewhere. Stalls which sell snacks seem to be as old as civilization, although sit-down restaurants have vanished and reappeared several times through history. China has a long tradition of restaurants, but eating establishments in European history were rare until the modern period. An inn or charity hostel might serve an extremely limited menu (often limited to a single dish, such as a soup or stew), or they might expect guests to bring their own food but cook it for them. Some societies in SF and fantasy stories regard either cooking or eating to be somewhat vulgar and done only in private. If that's the case, public eating places are likely to be rare and adventurers would have to find a quiet place to make and eat dinner.

Cookbooks

Ancient cookbooks are rarer and far less explicit than in the modern era. There were no standardized measurements and no way to accurately measure temperatures, and the recipes were written for an audience which, the authors assumed, already knew what they were doing. When cookbooks can be found, their instructions are extremely vague. One might be told to cook a dish "in a very hot oven until it is done." Such books will be all but useless to characters who don't already have cooking skills. Only in the nineteenth century do measurements become sufficiently standardized and thermometers accurate enough for explicit directions for the non-professional to appear. Since that time, both general and specialized cookbooks have proliferated. Given access to the proper ingredients, which can be a major issue, it is now possible for a moderately skilled home chef to accurately reproduce just about any cuisine without ever meeting a native chef or coming close to the cuisine's homeland. In the distant future, cookbooks may be replaced by catalogs of programs for household food synthesizers which mix and texture basic food components into dishes that would be impossible for the modern cook.

Food, Wealth, Medicine, and Magic

Food isn't just something you eat. It's also a source of wealth and power, particularly in a low-tech society. The vast

majority of wealthy people of antiquity were supported not by trade or industry so much as by their control of agricultural land. Even when trade did become important, spices and exotic foods were among the most important commodities. Pepper and other spices were in great demand, prized for both taste and medicinal properties, as well as being easy to transport, giving the merchant an enormous price-to-weight ratio (the old saw about pepper being used to cover up the taste of tainted meat is more than a little dubious, since the high cost of pepper made it unavailable to most Medieval Europeans).

One of the primary advantages of being rich at lower tech levels is the opportunity to eat well. The upper classes may consume "festival" foods on a daily basis and have access to foods that the poor will never see: fine wine, imported spices and the like. Dishes for the very rich may be mind-bogglingly elaborate, particularly at festivals. A particularly exotic feast might feature strange dishes made for the sake of extravagance, such as a rabbit stuffed into a goose stuffed into a pig all roasted inside an ox, edible sculptures made from pastry or bread, or dishes garnished or flavored with ingredients ranging from unusual to downright bizarre, including flower petals, musk, ambergris, precious metals pounded into leaf and precious stones reduced to powders. Since the old "preferred" foods are cheaper at higher levels of technology, the gap between upper and lower class diets begins to shrink, although the rich are still more likely to consume exotic foreign foods.

Another link between power and food has to do with the use of food in social relationships. A remarkable number of important social events in every society are centered around eating, or at least drinking, and an important factor in those events is who's buying. In a great many societies, one of the expectations about wealthy, powerful people is that they provide food and drink for their underlings and supporters. The same is generally the case for hosts, who are expected to provide sustenance for their guests. Powerful characters may be more or less obligated to supply large feasts for allies and employees on the occasion of weddings, births, and religious festivals. This obligation was even used as a political weapon. Some monarchs would travel around their countries, lodging with noblemen of dubious loyalty. Because those noblemen were essentially obligated to host their ruler (and his *entire* retinue), the clever monarch could eat his potential rival out of house and home. Contrarywise, characters making a play for higher social status would do well to host festivals and dinner parties.

There has long been a close relationship between food and medicine. For most of the history of civilization, doctors would be as likely to prescribe a special diet as to prescribe medicines. Indeed, some foods were initially used as medicines. Sugar's early use in Europe was as a medicine, and soda water was originally used as a base for medicinal preparations before it became a popular drink on its own. The doctor may prescribe either a particular food or a general change in diet, such as eating more vegetables and less grain. The reason may be specific to a disorder ("The radish is an infallible cure for gout.") or more general, treating underlying causes instead of symptoms ("The radish balances the choleric humor, which is out of balance in this patient.").

Just as early medical practice overlapped magical beliefs, foods can be used in the practice of magic. Spices and herbs are an integral part of any wizard's bag of raw materials, and blight on a particular food or an interruption of trade with a far-away land providing exotic spices might cause a crisis in a local magical community. The magical properties of some foods are so strong as to be a powerful curse. In some European folk beliefs, eating food offered by fairies will trap you away from the human world, while in Greek myth, Persephone was trapped in the underworld for part of the year because she ate six pomegranate seeds.

Making Up Cusines

For fictional societies, you might want to start easy and base exotic cuisines on real-world cuisines (dwarves eat German food, elves eat Japanese, orcs eat Twinkies and pork rinds, etc.). However, to really get your players' attention, you may want to come up with your own cuisines. As a first step, decide on a few "core" ingredients which will make up the bulk of the diet. Most agricultural societies use a cereal grain (or perhaps two or three), but they could also be acorns, beans, gourds, or even a few preferred species of animal. Next, pick a few ways in which those core ingredients will usually be prepared. Common methods of preparation include:

- Drying
- Wet heat (boiling, steaming)

- Dry heat (roasting, baking)
- Frying
- Grinding
- Fermenting
- Soaking
- Seasoning (salting, spicing, pickling)

You may want to pick a few combinations. For example, bread is essentially wheat which is ground, fermented, and baked. Radically different ingredients can be prepared in remarkably similar ways. Just about anything can be dried, ground up, and baked as a dense cake or wafer.

Probably the easiest way to come up with exotic cuisines is to concentrate on unfamiliar ingredients. Insects are good for gross-out effect, but are nevertheless an important food resource in some parts of the world. In a fantasy or alien world with giant, man-eating insects, man may return the favor and cultivate and eat other, equally giant but less vicious insects. Many flowers are edible, if only suitable for garnish and coloring. Tree leaves, wood (bamboo shoots are the only known edible wood, but you can make up your own), saps and nectars, reptiles and amphibians, beasts of burden, pet animals, microbial soups, and sea plants may be at the core of your exotic cuisine. Likewise, you can make use of unexpected parts of food sources; animal skins, organs, and even parts of bones can be used as a food.

A more subtle method, however, is to combine foods which aren't usually used together. One effective way of doing this is to use sweet foods in savory (that is, not sweet) dishes and vice versa. For example, chocolate is now a confection, but in Aztec Mexico, its birthplace, it was used in spicy moles and as part of a peppery drink far removed from our sweet, mellow hot chocolate. Sweet fruits may be pickled and otherwise seasoned to make bitter or pungent dishes. Moving in the other direction, traditionally savory foods can be used in sweetened dishes. Sweeteners may be added to meat dishes; sugared dried squid is a moderately popular snack food in parts of Asia. Many vegetables, such as carrots, tomatoes, and onions, can be used to sweeten dishes as-is or after some processing. Modern Americans might be used to carrot cake, but be somewhat surprised by a sweet onion tart (which, by the way, may be found in southern France).

Culinary Adventure Hooks

- **Head of the Table:** At last, the PCs have infiltrated the sinister Order of the Obscure Reference and are living in their secret monastery. All they have to do to unmask the Grand Master is to get close to him. But how? He only shows himself at the Order's grand dinners in the refectory. In order to complete their assignment, they must work their way up from the low benches at the back of the room to the high table on the dais through service to the Order, cajoling the masters of protocol, or impersonating people with better seats. Perhaps they might even join the serving or kitchen staff, who can go anywhere in the dining room.
- **Algaeloaf Again?:** The PCs are on a small vessel when the FTL drive suddenly dies, stranding them weeks away from rescue. The fusion power plant provides plenty of energy, but the ship isn't equipped with enough provisions to keep them alive that long. They'll have to jury-rig food synthesis equipment from the ship's life support gear and find out who sabotaged the hyperdrive...and who might try to poison their hydroponic garden.
- **Let Them Eat (Wedding) Cake:** The PCs are retainers of a lord who has, after long and difficult negotiation, secured an advantageous marriage for his daughter to solidify a shaky association with a reluctant ally. Word reaches them that a rival has slipped a few drops of fairy nectar into one of the dishes for the wedding feast, which will put whoever consumes it into an unbreakable slumber for a century. They must find the person responsible and, more importantly, find the poisoned dish without disrupting the wedding and destroying the alliance.

Selected Sources

If you don't already cook, you may need some pointers to examples of descriptions of unfamiliar foods and their use in fiction. Cookbooks can be good, but look for books written for a specialist audience. Most "popular" cookbooks dumb down the food and will do you no good at all. If recipes recommend using a pre-made mix or a bread machine, put the

book down. If you feel intimidated by any of the dishes, you've probably found a good one. Here are a few more specific suggestions:

- Vance, Jack: almost anything, but particularly the Dying Earth books, and chief among them *Cugel's Saga*. Vance has an unmatched gift for describing food.
- Rosener, Michaela: *The Stars Dispose* and *The Stars Compel*. Fantasy novels set in Renaissance Florence, with much of the action taking place in kitchens.
- Apicus: *De Re Coquinaria*, available in translation under other titles. One of the earliest cookbooks, this Roman work contains recipes ranging from the vile (garum, a popular Roman condiment made of fermented fish) to the familiar (a recognizable "french toast").
- Sterling, Bruce: *Holy Fire* This book presents a society where even vegetarianism is considered a risky lifestyle, and truly healthy food is produced in biological factories.
- *Gourmet* magazine. Nothing surprising to the experienced cook, but a useful source of descriptions of mildly obscure foods and unfamiliar preparations, particularly good if you want to base your fantasy cuisines on real-world examples. Many of *Gourmet's* recipes may be found on the web at <http://www.epicurious.com/>.
- *Iron Chef*: This remarkable Japanese cooking show (imagine Julia Child joining the WWF and moving to Asia) is being rebroadcast on the cable Food Network. The food is often, by Western standards, outlandish, and the show is a good example of how other societies can regard what is edible and how it can be prepared.

Vacation

(WARNING: This week, *Random Thought Table* truly lives up to its name. The usually spastic editor has been replaced, for the time being, with a mellower margarita-drinking one.)

Ahh, vacation. Good for the soul, this. Being back home for week has been very pleasant. So has visiting a Renaissance Festival, although it's a good thing I don't go to one of those things with a huge sack of money . . . I'd be able to transmute it into stuff of dubious utility in no time.

"What didja get at the Fair, Steven?"

"Oh, a quarterstaff, a suit of leather armor, a bard's outfit, a kilt, ten puzzle rings, an astrolabe, a henna tattoo, a mace, a dozen ceramic roses . . ."

"That's pretty sad, dude."

"I saved the receipts for tax purposes!"

Of course, I haven't been able to leave the magazine *entirely* alone in the interim; I've checked in on mail (about 300 messages this week so far!) and visited the boards as well . . . as I mentioned via email to one SJ Games co-worker, "I *am* on vacation . . . meaning I'm only working 5-10 hours this week on the magazine. <grin>"

Here are some random adventure thoughts that have sprung to mind whilst I've been kicking back and relaxing.

- Have the trusty butler (or other employee of the heroes' group) take a trip for personal reasons; casually mention that he's using a month or two of his vacation time. (The Alfred Pennyworths of the world must get vacation time, but they never seem to *use* it . . .)
- For many space (or sea)-faring campaigns, the "shore leave" adventure is a staple. What can happen when adventurers are supposed to be in a secluded, unreachable enclosed environment (a pleasure planet, a tropical island, a holodeck, etc.)?
- Vacations make wonderful, different ways to start adventures. Ask the players what they're doing for "downtime," then begin the adventure that way. "You're skiing in Aspen, when suddenly . . ."
- If you use this technique, make sure that you give your players "real" vacations; have exciting and dangerous things fail to happen. Otherwise, you run the risk of your players being terrified to go anywhere exciting. "Where do you go for vacation?" "Ummm . . . the fifth basement of the Pentagon, whimpering in a locked closet while holding a loaded Uzi."
- You may not be able to convince your players to have their characters take vacations; heaven knows my characters tended to be workaholics, using downtime to kick doors and get into trouble. In this case, consider using contacts, dependants, allies, and the like. "We just got an urgent telegram from Higgins." "Higgins? Isn't he skiing in Aspen?"
- Use vacations to allow opportunities to advance subplots.. Romantic interests can get their quiet moments, fame and fortune subplots can begin ("Look, it's famed Planet journalist, Abbie Rhode!"), hunted might show up, and so on.
- Use vacations as rewards or alternate "treasures." Mission command can give cruise tickets, adventurers can find exclusive passes to the Secluded Mountain Spa, heroes can be invited to visit the home of the elfkin whenever they want.

Things I've Learned While On Vacation

1. The entire magazine could be run from a WebTV television console device.
2. Running the entire magazine from a WebTV would result in the departure of my remaining sanity.
3. Watching *Fight Club* with your parents is definitely a different way to experience the movie.

Just some ideas. As for myself, I'm enjoying my vacation. Whee!

* * *

Well, the ratings are in, and it looks like you all like the Iron Ref idea. (Either that, or you *really* liked my introduction.)

Now, a couple weeks ago I talked about [secrets](#); I have one to share with you all.

Anyway, when I ran the Iron Ref articles, although I received a lot of positive email and feedback, I *did* receive a few emails from folks who were upset by the theme issue. Some folks argued that if they didn't like (or know about) *Iron Chef*, then the issue was useless or incomprehensible.

While this might be true of Ken's column or John's contribution (though I don't necessarily believe this to be so), and putting aside the two articles that *weren't* related to the theme, I didn't consider this to be the case for the Iron Ref feature. In fact, I found this ironic, since at the time I organized and printed the article, I'd never even **seen** *Iron Chef*. No, I'd merely heard the idea in the newsgroups a while ago, and it sounded neat . . . so I did it.

So as I was reading these emails, I found myself wondering, "Wow; I guess I'm in the awkward position of editing things I don't even understand!" While it certainly wouldn't be the first time, I was still amused.

So that's my secret.

(As an aside, I *did* see the show for the first time over my vacation. Very odd . . . but impossible to pull the eyes away from, like a traffic accident or *Pop-Up Video*.)

* * *

Hopefully, by the time you read this, I am already at (or am enroute to, or am coming back from) the [Game Invasion](#) convention in Jacksonville, Florida, where I'll be attending as a guest. (I'd have let you all know sooner, but I wasn't sure I was going to make it; I didn't want anyone making the trek just to meet me [hah!], only to be disappointed.) At present I'm not quite sure what I'm going to *do* while there, but I'm sure I'll have fun.

-- Steven Marsh

* * *

*Last week's answer: **Fudge**, section 6.353. (**Fudge Expanded Edition** p. 65)*

(Four stars) "Not everyone is enjoying this unseasonably warm spring. Indeed, it has been a season of death for those on the South End, as a recent series of gruesome murders continues."

Murphy's Rules



by John Kovalic

Murphy's Rules



Murphy's Rules



Dork Tower!



Dork Tower!



Worldbuilding With Extra Pulp

"Had I been present at the Creation, I should have given some useful hints for better ordering of the universe."

-- Alfonso X, called the Wise, King of Leon and Castile

Here's another run at worldbuilding, this time an annotated example of a world designed to support a specific genre of stories: pulp aerospace adventure. For this column, I'm reprinting a portion of an actual player handout from an old dimension-hopping campaign I ran -- the timeline to an alternate-history science-fantasy world I nicknamed "High Red" for reasons that seem peculiar even to me, now. (At one point, I and my co-conspirators had alternate histories written for each of the 128 colors in a large box of Crayolas. Just be glad I'm not doing that any more.) Interspersed with that timeline, I'm inserting notes explaining why I made the decisions I did, and how I intended them to affect game play and player decision-making. Although the initial scenario was a one-shot "rescue Amelia Earhart" action story, my players had shown a tendency to revisit worlds they liked, and I wanted Reality Tunguska (nee High Red) to be one of them. In the event, they never went back, which I blame on the scenario, not the world -- and on the fact that I had a bunch of other great ideas to throw at them.

"He had no idea what comprised her usual diet, but he bought a can of New York roast beef and one of Venusian frog-broth and a dozen fresh canal-apples and two pounds of that Earth lettuce that grows so vigorously in the fertile canal-soil of Mars. He felt that she must surely find something to her liking in this broad variety of edibles, and -- for his day had been very satisfactory -- he hummed 'The Green Hills of Earth' to himself in a surprisingly good baritone as he climbed the stairs."

-- C.L. Moore, "Shambleau" (1933)

The flavor I wanted to capture for this scenario, and for this world, was very much like the wonderful indeterminate-future, mixed-technology world of C.L. Moore's Northwest Smith stories. In two hundred years or so, with a stardrive, maybe some discreet biotech, and an alien invasion or two (or possibly a Buck Rogers-style Global War), this setting and Moore's might be almost indistinguishable. But for right now, it's time to look to the skies.

1908: Unknown object obliterates St. Petersburg, Russia, at noon on June 30, leaving behind chunks of radioactive metal, including uranium and unknown transuranic elements such as astronium and petrinium.

For details of the Tunguska Object, and for an earlier summary of this very world, see [my previous column](#) on the subject. The reason I picked Tunguska, rather than some other breakpoint, is that I wanted a recognizably Belle Epoque politics with recognizably 1930s Indiana Jones geopolitics -- Germany, France, Britain, Italy, America, Japan.

1909: German Army moves into Poland, the Baltics, and White Russia; Japan occupies Manchuria, Korea, and Vladivostok; Britain establishes protectorates over Central Asia.

Had I wanted to tell slightly different, more Earth-driven and ideological, stories, I could have decided that the chaos in Russia did, in fact, lead to a socialist revolution. But for the purposes of this world, I wanted to keep the Great Powers focused on space colonialization -- retelling the stories of European imperialism, which faced little or no ideological challenge. So I just removed Russia.

1910: Team of scientists at the Kaiser Wilhelm Institut split the atomic nucleus of astronium; the Curies, and Rutherford and Moseley, replicate the feat by the end of the year.

1911: Henri Coanda invents the jet-reaction engine.

1914: Kaiser Wilhelm Institut team under Einstein develops self-sustaining astronium fission.

1916: France and Italy back Arab revolt against German-backed Ottoman Turkey; Britain attempts neutrality while remaining in Egypt.

1918: Germany, France, and Britain all develop plutonium-fission bombs.

Thus preventing, via nuclear blackmail, any overly-distracting war on Earth. Which would support tales of spies, mercenaries, and other "deniable" PC types, in case the characters returned here.

1919: Willy Ley designs the atomic torch ship; Baron Manfred von Richthofen becomes the first man in orbit. Berlin-Baghdad railway completed.

Using the Red Baron here sends an important signal to the players -- this is a world about airmen, and the more superheroic the better. Had I wanted to tell a different story, the first man in space could have been Vladimir Orlok, Clark Savage Jr., or even Reed Richards.

1921: Von Richthofen placed in command of the Imperial Raumwaffe; Winston Churchill becomes Minister for Aerospace and First Aerospace Lord of the Admiralty. Hermann Goering becomes the first man on the moon. British expedition under Alcock and Brown follows later that year.

1922: Frank Whittle invents the turbojet. Arabian Revolt settles into status quo with German satellite state in Turkey, British in Kurdistan, French in Syria and Mesopotamia.

All this distracting detail about the Middle East was to set up any *Lawrence of Arabia* or *Raiders of the Lost Ark* action for the putative sequel. It also had the nice effect of splitting up all the Middle Eastern oil so that nobody got left out.

1923: British begin construction of Entebbe Spaceport; construct a permanent moonbase in Copernicus, begin testing "lunar gun." Moonbase race begins. General Billy Mitchell placed in charge of the U.S. Space Command as a way of getting him out of the Army.

The sidetracking of Billy Mitchell into a career that he's uniquely suited for is a little poetic justice from me, the author -- and it helps remind us that we're in a pulp world where bucking your superiors and being larger-than-life is actually a success strategy. The "lunar gun" is a little reverse-homage to Verne and Heinlein, and a warning to the players that the science in this reality plays by the rules of drama, and not the other way around.

1924: Cpt. Edward Rickenbacker, USSC, becomes the first man on Mars. Germans and British orbit wireless-transmission satellites.

1925: Georges Gunemeyer disappears on French expedition to Venus. Chinese Republic in turmoil after Sun-Yat Sen's death; Japanese begin backing local warlords. Willy Ley invents the atomic-ion engine, making interplanetary travel practical.

But the bogus science had to be sufficiently late that the first bloom of exploration doesn't simply recapitulate *Space: 1889*, especially since I was already ripping off chunks of its planetology and themes wholesale. This also helped drive the 1908 Tunguska breakpoint; too late for "luminiferous aether," too early for "flying saucers." Tesla, normally my go-to guy for improbable technology, I dismissed as opening up too big a can of worms -- the man was just too prolific. By simply presenting a "reaction-lite thruster" I got the effect I wanted -- easy zipping around the solar system, and proper pulp-era dogfighting tactics.

1926: British found Marsport, the first permanent Martian colony, on the slopes of Olympus Mons. German expedition under Oswald Boelcke plants Charlottenburg colony on Venus. Italo Balbo leads Italian expedition to Mercury. Germans begin construction of Kilimanjaro Spaceport, Italians begin Mogadisco Spaceport in Somaliland.

I added a bunch of details on the various planets to the handout; suffice it to say that they parallel the ones in *GURPS Steampunk* and in all properly antiquated planetary-romance SF. Mars has canals and a dying race, Venus has soda-water oceans, the Moon has fungi-filled hollow caves. The continuing mentions of the Great Powers' colonial Spaceports not only let us know that their rivalry has driven a hyperbolic Space Race, but they reinforce the "imperialism" theme of the alternate history -- I've been very heavily influenced by Moorcock's *Warlord of the Air*.

1927: René Leduc invents the ramjet.

1928: Franklin Delano Roosevelt elected President of the United States. Japanese move into North China. French begin construction of Kourou Spaceport in French Guiana.

1929: U.S. begins construction of Jefferson Station in LEO; Goddard develops the orbital ferry. Italian Ferrarin-del Prete expedition explores the Jovian system, constructs shipyard on Io when del Prete's craft nearly destroyed in Jovian atmosphere. U.S. begins supplying arms and advisers to Chinese government.

Okay, the Jovian system was going to be another "frontier dogfighting" zone, should things come to that. And the war in China lets me keep at least half the Axis active, since I've left Germany Kaiserine and prevented Hitler.

1930: Admiral Nagano placed in charge of Japanese Imperial Planetary Navy, Japanese begin construction of Hainan Spaceport. Panic of '30 causes major dislocations in European, North American economies; planetary colonization and exploitation speeded up as psychological "safety valve," full-employment program, and subsidy to big businesses.

This is a bogus justification for all that stuff in space, just barely a decade after Ley invents the torch ship. Admittedly, with a much smaller industrial base, the Portuguese had conquered the whole Indian Ocean basin within a decade after going there -- but they didn't have to bring their own oxygen. Hopefully, by now, the players are on my side, and willing to buy the premise to get the pulp.

1931: Sir Charles E. Kingsford-Smith founds Ceres Station for the Royal Navy. Construction begun on Victrix (British) and Valhalla (German) LEO stations.

1933: Kingsford-Smith establishes forward British base on Europa. Jefferson and Valhalla Stations completed. Baron von Huenefeld leads German expedition to Ganymede, establishes Raumwaffe base there.

Boo, hiss! Germans on Ganymede! Baron Ehrenfreid Gunther von Huenefeld, the "Crazy Baron," headed the first transatlantic flight from East to West, on a Junkers W33, the *Bremen*, in 1928. Looking up cool aviation history basically wrote all my historical NPCs for me.

1934: Victrix Station completed; Japanese begin construction of Yamato Station. American presence in China increased.

1935: Britain begins construction of Singapore Spaceport; Germans begin building Madang Spaceport in New Guinea. Hughes Aircraft, Marland Oil, and Brazil begin joint commercial spaceport, refinery complexes at Belem.

I had an idea that I might need a commercial presence in space, either as boldhearted Heinleinian entrepreneurs, or as evil manipulating alien-egg coveting weasels, or both.

1936: General Mitchell dies, Admiral Richard E. Byrd appointed chief of USSC, USSC headquarters moved to Tampa Spaceport; construction begun on Pearl Harbor Spaceport.

Although Billy Mitchell was a happier, and probably a healthier, guy in this reality, I still killed him on schedule to get Richard Byrd onto the timeline. I remain conflicted about the USSC's rank and grade terminology, as you can tell.

1937: Amelia Earhart vanishes in the Saturnian System.

1938: Yamato Station completed.

Also in the handout, I mentioned "odd lights and electromagnetic bursts" emanating from Titan, also in the Saturnian System. If that doesn't set up a scenario, nothing will. And just to be sure, I railroaded the PCs onto the *USS Stephen Decatur*, with Cmdr. Robert A. Heinlein, USSC, commanding.

Shooting to Live

Non-Lethal Weapons for *Fading Suns*

by Lloyd Brown III

Characters in roleplaying games are notorious for their propensity for heavy firepower. Given the choice between food and guns, players seem to prefer guns, apparently on the assumption that they can kill their food, or at least kill somebody else and take their food.

Perhaps a part of the problem is the equipment list. Looking over the list of available weapons, the player can readily see that non-violent options are few and often inferior to deadly force. The Gamemaster is in a similar situation; in order to threaten player characters properly, he has to rely on bigger, better guns. Each enemy the characters defeat leaves them more heavily armed.

A potential solution to the arms race is a wider variety of non-lethal weapons. Non-lethal weapons offer many advantages to both players and GMs. First, the person using them has the option of capturing his opponent, allowing for the roleplaying opportunities after the inevitable fight as well as before. Secondly, player characters don't need to worry as much about legal prosecution if they capture instead of kill their opponent. In fact, not only will the law appreciate such consideration, their enemies will, too. The villain whose brother was let go with nothing more than a headache and a bloody nose after the characters defeat him feels no driving need to humiliate, torture, and kill the heroes. Finally, players need not fear for their character's lives all day and all night. The standard adventuring party tactic of leaving standing watches in all situations and places can be abandoned if it is known that the potential villains don't have any guns. The player characters can stop behaving with military caution and start acting like real people.

The Church approves of these devices as permissible technology, except for the man o'war slugs, which they officially ban to back the Emperor's restriction (although they rarely enforce this ban unless it furthers their own goals), and the drone. The Church considers the drone an insidious pagan weapon as evil as extreme cybernetics.

Buzz Stick (TL4): The buzz stick operates as a normal club most of the time, inflicting 4 dice of bludgeoning damage on a successful hit. When the buzzer is activated, the stick delivers an additional electrical jolt designed to stun the opponent by shorting out his nervous system. The person struck must succeed in an Endurance + Vigor roll or let go of anything held in his hands, which usually results in dropping a weapon, but might also result in letting go of a ship's controls, releasing a held hostage, or falling off a ladder.

A single charge lasts for 10 uses. Cost: 50 firebirds.

Man O' War Slugs (TL 5): These projectiles are shotgun slugs filled with a gel that carries the stinging venom of deadly jellyfish. The amazing gel keeps the stinging properties of the venom fresh almost indefinitely, allowing it to be stored in the slugs until fired at a target. The shooter makes a normal attack to hit a target, and the gel splashes onto the victim, delivering stinging material across a wide surface area.

For each wound a person suffers from the man o' war slug, he must succeed in a Strength + Vigor roll or suffer two more wounds from intense pain. If the pain reduces the victim to 0 wounds, his system shuts down entirely from the pain and he falls unconscious. Impact wounds are normal and might kill a target regardless of the additional pain.

The Emperor has outlawed these weapons across the Known Worlds, although the Vau continue to smuggle them into Cadiz. Man o' war slugs cost 2 firebirds each.

Heavy Stunner (TL 6): The heavy stunner is a rifle-sized version of the hand stunner. Amaltheans and others who don't wish to kill in self-defense carry the weapon when they expect threats from elite troops, aliens, and others that might shrug off the effects of a hand stunner.

The best heavy stunners are made by Argobast, who hope to please the church with this technology and thereby earn approval to indulge in other research. Their Dreamlands model is the industry's standard model.

Targets hit by a stunner must roll Endurance + Vigor with -2 on the goal. Failure indicates that the target is stunned for the rest of that turn and the next entire turn, as with a hand stunner. If the damage taken equals or exceeds the character's Endurance, she rolls as above but failure means she is rendered unconscious. Like a hand stunner, heavy stunner damage is healed entirely after one span, but additional damage from other sources can result in fatal wounds. Cost: 500 firebirds.

Cough Gun (TL 5): The cough gun takes its name from the sound it makes as it fires a burst of compressed air. This blast has a miserably short range and a slow rate of fire, but it has the advantage of unlimited ammunition. Whereas energy weapons use replaceable fusion cells, the cough gun has a single internal cell that lasts for years.

Some criminals favor the cough gun because it leaves no telltale bullet casings or other traces that can link them to the damage it causes. Unlike other non-lethal weapons, this one can kill, but it kills so slowly and ineffectively that murders attributed to it are rare. Several storehouses on Stigmata maintain cases of these weapons in case the garrison is ever besieged and must rely on them for backup weapons.

The cough gun does 3 dice of damage and knocks down any opponent who fails to make a Strength + Vigor roll each time he is hit. On top of its other drawbacks, the cough gun is heavy and makes a shrill whining noise between shots as it compresses air for its next blast. The Gathman Tornado is the premier model, being found from Leagueheim to Bannockburn. It costs a paltry 100 firebirds.

Suythe Poison: Suythe is a rare toxin taken from a venomous lizard on Gwynneth. The Van Gelders alone buy enough to keep its harvesters in business. When the notorious assassins need less than usual, a few dozen vials find their way to the open market on Criticorum, from where they appear all over the Known Worlds.

The poison works almost instantly upon introduction to the bloodstream, spreading numbness through the body as it moves through the victim's arteries and veins. The victim must make a Passion + Stoic Body roll or the area struck becomes numb and useless immediately. On a critical failure, the target collapses into an immobile heap, able to do nothing but watch and listen. Numbness begins to wear off after 10 minutes, at which point the victim can move (painfully) but suffers -2 to all goal rolls Strength, Dexterity or Endurance. After another 10 minutes, the target has recovered enough to function normally. Cost: 500 firebirds per dose.

Dart Rifle (TL 4): A dart rifle, also called a Piercer, is a single-shot rifle with a large bore designed to fire a special hypodermic that delivers its contents on delivery. Generally the contents are drugs or poisons (such as suythe) designed to disable a target for capture. The weapon has no magazine and must be loaded one projectile at a time. The Mercy model is widely used in the capture of wild animals on Holy Terra, but Inquisitors sometimes use it to bring heretics to an involuntary confession. Cost: 200 firebirds. The special needles cost 1 crest each.

Drone (TL 6): The drone produces subsonic, rhythmic tones that dull the senses and leave the victim feeling confused and disoriented. Its main drawback is that it takes time to work its effect. Even more so than the lightning strobe, drones tend to affect everyone nearby. Hence, the drone is a principle defense against intruders rather than a mobile offensive unit.

Typically, the drone is a system of speakers spread throughout an area of 2,000 square feet or more. For each 30 minutes spent within its area, characters must roll below Endurance on d20 or temporarily lose 1 point of Wits. The Wits loss lasts as long as the characters are in the drone's area. Wits is restored at one point every ten minutes once the character leaves the area. The operating center, once found, can be disabled by a successful Tech + Mech Redemption roll, although it could well be booby-trapped against such interference.

Nulna of Leminkainen is the only known manufacturer of drones. Their main customers are Vuldrok pirates who install them in their ships as defense while they are away raiding. The raiders sometimes return to find a cabin full of happily drooling invaders slumped against the hull walls. Cost: 1,000 firebirds per 2,000 square feet they are designed

to protect.

Lightning Strobe (TL 7): A strobe pattern of certain frequency invokes instinctive reactions in the human nervous system that can cause it to effectively shut down.

Any flashlight of tech level 7 or higher can be set to strobe on this function if the person adjusting the setting rolls 5 successes with Tech + Mech Redemption. The person aiming the flashlight rolls $Dx + Vigor$ to point it at the target's eyes, with each success subtracting one from the target's $Dx + Dodge$ roll to avoid the effects. If the target does not dodge or rolls no successes, he is either stunned and unable to act (failure) or knocked unconscious (no resistance or a fumble on the attempt). An energy shield offers no defense against a lightning strobe.

House Shelit has constructed a type of flashlight dedicated to this specialized use. The Shelit Blinder has a pistol grip, allowing its user to use his $Dx + Shoot$ instead of $Dx + Vigor$ when aiming at his target and carry it in a holster as well. Binders don't function on any alien races, only humans.

Because of the difficulty in aiming a flashlight at a person's eyes and keeping it on them long enough to have an effect, a more common use of this technique is to use it to trap forbidden places where an open bulb can emit its light waves omnidirectionally. Avoiding such an open strobe requires a successful $Dx + Dodge$ roll and at least three victory points. The Shelit Blinder and others like it cost 200 firebirds. The stationary version costs 100 firebirds per unit, and most companies prefer to sell a minimum of four units in order to ensure a customer's maximum security (and their own maximum profit).

Stream Gun (TL5): A stream gun has a thick barrel which attaches to either a small canister underneath the barrel or a larger container carried on the back, much like a flamethrower. The stream that it fires is a sticky tube that adheres to anything it touches. A person struck will find his arms attached to his body, his legs stuck together, and his body sticking to walls, floors, or other nearby objects.

The attacker rolls victory dice as normal for a successful hit. Instead of damage, however, he's rolling for completeness of coverage of his target. Each victory point means the target is bound and unable to move for one round. The person struck must make a Strength + Dodge roll to break free. Each victory point reduces the time bound by one round. Breaking free of the adhesive is tiring and temporarily reduces the victim's Strength score by one each round spent trying to escape. The victim can prevent this loss by waiting for the adhesive to wear off, which takes about 30 minutes. After that time, the victim can tear the stuff off with little difficulty. Lost Strength is restored at the rate of one point per hour spent resting.

The self-contained version of the gun has only enough adhesive for one attack, and so is used against specific targets in abductions or kidnappings. It also sees some use in law enforcement. The Harastan Ogre's Hand is the favored model, preferred by Brothers Battle for bringing in heretics whose low-scale activities don't earn a visit from the Avestites. Harastan's larger Titan Grip is the preferred backpack-style weapon. It contains enough adhesive to bind a dozen man-sized targets. The Ogre's Hand costs 250 firebirds, but each use requires replacing the canister for 25 firebirds, although multiple canisters can be carried. The Titan Grip costs 600 firebirds. Refilling its backpack apparatus costs 200 firebirds.

Eleras Gas: Eleras gas exists in thin quantities underneath the polar regions of Pandemonium. It affects human muscles and tendons, resulting in reduced coordination, weakness, and fatigue. Early signs include sweating, blurred vision, and slight fever. In concentrated form, eleras can weaken a person to immediate exhaustion, turning his muscles to water and bringing him to his knees.

Eleras gas generally appears in a canister and is delivered by expulsion from both ends within a few seconds. The canister has a short fuse of up to three seconds (like a standard grenade) and emits its contents in an area of 3 meters. A grenade-launcher version is also available.

Anyone within the area of effect must make an immediate Strength + Vigor check or her Strength is temporarily reduced by 4 points. Characters carrying heavy loads might crash to the ground, while characters whose Strength is reduced to 0 (Strength does not go below 0) fall helpless, unable to move.

The effects last for two full turns automatically. Every second turn thereafter, the character may make a Strength + Vigor check (using the reduced Strength score) to restore one point of Strength. An eleras grenade costs 100 firebirds in its thrown form or 150 firebirds for a grenade-launcher form.

Shrieker (TL6): "Shrieker" is Scraver jargon for any device that generates sound waves too high for the human ear to bear. The device could take any form, but the Burnur Shatterer dominates the market for this type of item. It is a simple box that fits comfortably in the hand, about 8" long, 3" wide and less than an inch in thickness. At the press of a button, the shrieker emits a piercing whistle that climbs the scale from a low bass into inaudibility in under a second. Anyone without protection must roll Endurance + Stoic Body or be deafened for a span. Anyone who rolls a critical failure passes out from pain and stays unconscious for 10 full minutes. On waking, the character must make an Endurance + Stoic Body or suffer permanent hearing damage (as the curse Bad Hearing). The Amalthean rite Healing Hand of Saint Amalthea automatically cures the deafness, as will Restoration if the caster rolls 6 victory points or more. For each meter from the device, characters add 1 to their goal roll.

Besides its effects on living things, the shrieker shatters glass and ceramic objects in a 3-meter radius. The operator and his allies typically wear hearing protection before activating it. Standard hearing protection adds +5 to the goal roll for resisting the deafness and prevents the character from being knocked out. Characters not equipped with proper protection who have their hands over their ears add +2 to their goal. The shrieker costs 250 firebirds.

Clamshell trap (TL6): The clamshell trap is a large, bulky device used in a defensive measure to capture an intruder or enemy and hold him until somebody can arrive to transport him to a more permanent secure location. The trap lies either on the floor, ceiling, or wall and comes with no camouflage of its own. It consists of a five-pointed starfish-shaped piece of canvas that seems to have wires or ribs inside its otherwise flat surface. Once 5 pounds or more is placed in its center, the arms wrap shut, binding the target and entwining tightly around loose limbs.

It takes five minutes to set the clamshell trap, and the person setting it may attach the outside to a rope so that the prey caught inside may not simply run away, taking the trap with him (this technique is usually used if the trap is placed on a wall instead of the more usual floor). Once the trap has sprung, it holds the target as a wrestling character with a Strength 4 and Vigor 5. The device is constructed so that once closed, it does not continue to damage its victim. A person might be reduced to vital wounds, but it will not die. When closed, the trap looks like an elongated mollusk. A clamshell trap costs 200 firebirds.

Non-Lethal Weapons

Weapon	Roll	Init	Goal	DMG	STR	RNG	Rate	SIZ	Cost
Buzz stick	Dx + Melee			4	2	-	-	M	50
Heavy stunner	Dx + Shoot		+1	5 (S)	-	10/20	1	XL	500
Cough gun	Dx + Shoot	-1	-1	3	-	5/10	1	M	100
Dart Rifle	Dx + Shoot	-1	+2	1	-	10/20	1	XL	200
Lightning strobe	Dx + Vigor or Dx + Shoot		+1	0	-	20/30	2	S	200
Stream gun									
Handheld	Dx + Shoot		+1	-	-	5/10	1	L	250
Backpack	Dx + Shoot		+2	-	-	10	1	XL	600

Old Henry ("Henry the Assessor")

by Phil Masters

GURPS Swashbucklers:

ST: 9
DX: 11
IQ: 13
HT: 10

Advantages: Contacts (two capable fences, "Street," "connected," both available 9-); Contact (clerk in a gem-trading house, "Business," effective skill 12-, available 9-); Literacy; Reputation +2 (as a useful contact, among pirate crews and the like, 10-).

Disadvantages: Age 55; Careful; Status -1; Struggling; Weak Will -3.

Quirks: Enjoys a drink or two, but is careful not to get drunk among strangers; Likes beautiful things, but won't usually risk much for them; Talks "a bit like a gentleman" compared to most people he deals with.

Skills: Accounting-10; Appreciate Beauty-15; Area Knowledge (England)-12; Detect Lies-12; Fast-Talk-12; Filch-9; First Aid/TL4- 12; Heraldry-11; History-10; Holdout-11; Merchant-11; Occultism-11; Panhandling-12; Riding (Mule)-9; Savoir-Faire (Servant)-14; Stealth- 11; Streetwise-13; Survival (Urban)-11.

Languages: English-13 (native); French-11.

Mage: the Sorcerers Crusade:

Nature: Sensualist

Demeanor: Renunciate/Sage

Attributes: Strength/1, Dexterity/2, Stamina/2, Charisma/1, Manipulation/2, Appearance/2, Perception/3, Intelligence/3, Wits/2.

Talents: Alertness/2, Awareness/1, Dodge/2, Elusion/1, Subterfuge/1.

Skills: Etiquette/2, Research/1, Riding/1, Stealth/1.

Knowledges: Academics/1, Culture/1, Enigmas/1, Investigation/1, Linguistics/1 (French), Occult/1, Seneschal/3, Symbolism/2.

Backgrounds: Resources/1.

Willpower: 4

Lace & Steel:

Disposition: Three of Wands (R): Old Henry's life has taught him always to expect the worst.

CHARACTERISTICS:

Strength	7
Endurance	9

Dexterity	11
Reason	12
Intuition	13
Drive	8
Charisma	8
Magical Aptitude	10
Hit Points	4

SKILLS:

Assess Personality-1, Brawling-1, Cutting Sword-0, Detect Lie-0, Etiquette-3, Geography-0, Language (Alamarian)-0, Legend Lore-0, Literacy-0, Merchant-3, Riding-0, Spot Hidden-1, Streetwise-2, Travel- 0.

(Note: Old Henry is a native speaker of Modern Tantic. His Etiquette skill was learned from the point of view of an observant servant; he knows how things are supposed to *look*, rather than how to do them himself. It also combines with his Merchant and Legend Lore skills to make him exceptionally adept in the assessment of *objets d'art* and luxury goods; give him an effective skill of 3 on any Reason or Intuition tests when evaluating such items.)

Image

Old Henry is a fixture on the docks of some city frequented by the PCs, and thereabouts; a battered old fellow with some taste for a drink, but also with a high-mannered, even courtly way about him when he chooses to use it. He will talk to almost anyone who will buy him a drink, and listen to offers from most quarters, but he is a fair judge of character, and will try to avoid dealings with people who could get him into deep trouble or physical danger, including most officers of the law. (A reputation as a possible informer would not only be bad for his business; it would probably get him killed.)

It's no great secret that Old Henry makes his living through his specialist education. He is well-known to the pirates and some other rogues of this part of the world, and what they mostly know is that he knows about *art*. The point is, sometimes a lucky rogue gets hold of plunder that's not gold or jewels, but that's worth plenty in the right place, and that's more conveniently portable than most loot. The trouble is, even the run of fences don't know what's worth what, or how to get the best money for it. Old Henry, though, does. He may well have useful acquaintances in various places, but his greatest importance is that he knows what might be worth going to some trouble over, and what might not.

Background

There are rumours that Old Henry is a fallen aristocrat of some description, or at least a gentleman; some of these tales may be more specific, depending on the place and time. For example, in an English Civil War-era pirate game, he might be reputed to be an English lord who has managed to get on the wrong side of both Cromwell and the Royalists by trying to play both sides against the middle, while in *Lace & Steel*, he would be Duncruighan, and some people might believe that he was a cousin to some of the more conservative aristocrats who have got on the wrong side of King Firined. In fact, these wild rumors are wrong (unless the GM chooses to make one of them true, to confuse the players); the boring truth is that Henry was a servant in a grand house who got thrown out for offending the master of the place's son.

Still, there is a small oddity in even the true tale. Old Henry wouldn't know as much as he does if he didn't have a real love for artistry and fine things -- a love that developed when he was helping one of his former employers maintain and catalogue his art collection. Then, however, the son of the house came home from a stay in the big city with some appalling "aristocratic manners"; he took to walking mud into expensive silk carpets with his riding-boots, spilling drinks on expensive items of furniture, breaking ornaments, and possibly stealing smaller objects to sell to cover his gambling debts. Henry kept his counsel for a while, but eventually snapped and told the "young master" what he thought of all this. Unfortunately, the "old master" was a doting father, and it wasn't Henry's place as a servant to

criticise his betters; he was thrown out on his ear. This began a downward spiral that took him right to the gutter before he pulled back a little by adopting his current career.

(It should be noted that Old Henry learned his lesson when he lost his job; he would never risk speaking out of turn over a mere *thing* these days, if his neck might be at stake.)

Abilities

Old Henry is no fighter, and relies on seeming harmless, and being useful and essentially trustworthy, to keep him alive. His key ability is an eye for fine things -- a sense that goes beyond simple knowledge into a real aesthetic sense. He actually has quite a taste for real beauty, and may show his pleasure when handling fine artworks, although he wouldn't risk danger or trouble to possess or protect such objects. He also has all the skills of a good servant to the upper classes, and even speaks a few words of an appropriate foreign language. (The choice of native and learned languages in the above character skill lists are of course just suggestions that can be changed as appropriate to the campaign.) In order to survive, he has learned to be light on his feet, but his combat skills are the minimum necessary to enable him to try and get away if trouble starts.

Although GMs are of course free to change specific details in this character sheet, there are some limits. Whatever the setting or style of game, Old Henry is not at all likely to possess magical or exotic powers; he's a simple man with a good eye for valuable things, no more. Still, it is *just* possible that, if he were to stumble across something magical, or if some of the loot brought to him for assessment was more exotic than its holder knew, Old Henry's practised judgement and patchy knowledge would enable him to spot whatever was unusual, and maybe he could even work out how to use it. He would regard this as a fearfully difficult situation; he is just greedy enough to want to exploit such knowledge, just wise enough to see that some power probably ought to be kept out of the hands of the sort of rogues he deals with, and just moral enough to see that keeping quiet might not be an acceptable option. At times like this, he might turn to the PCs, or he might not.

Game Uses

Old Henry is presented here for use in a range of games that include swashbuckling and piracy in a broadly Renaissance setting; however, he could easily be adapted for almost any game in which some thieves might pick valuable artworks that they don't know what to do with. Just adapt his specific skills to fit the background. In a **GURPS Swashbucklers** game, he could appear on the streets of Port Royal, or perhaps some European or American port where pirates can venture with caution. In **Mage: the Sorcerers Crusade**, he could be known to some Void Seekers (or even to some Skyrigger crews -- some very odd acquisitions must surely pass through their hands at times, so perhaps Old Henry has found his way to Portus Crucis), or he could perhaps find himself caught between freebooters and the strange powers of some Hermetic or Celestial Master whose island retreat they have raided. In **Lace & Steel**, he would be found in one of Duncruigh's shadier ports, or just possibly in a Duncruighan outpost in the Harabian seas or the Western Isles.

As noted above, Henry is careful not to get a reputation as an informer, for the sake of his health. However, he is also careful not to annoy the authorities too much, if he can't simply avoid them altogether; that could be equally bad for his prospects. PCs on the side of the law would do better to cultivate him as a contact than simply to try to pin any charges on him; he is essentially harmless, not actually *directly* involved in serious crime, and will probably drop a few hints and pass on a few well-known rumours if treated politely and bought a few drinks. Incidentally, he is quick-witted enough to withstand most verbal interrogation, but would crumple under torture; he keeps quiet out of a practical sense of self-preservation, not because of any sense of duty or ethics.

Adventure Seeds

- **Hot Stuff:** Someone brings a recently-acquired item to Old Henry for assessment; a finely-decorated writing-case, holding the usual pens, ink, and so on, but also a bundle of letters. Old Henry frowns when he sees the box,

and then breaks out in a cold sweat when he looks at the letters. It turns out that the crest on the box marks it as belonging to someone very powerful indeed, and the letters are clearly addressed to a mistress, and are (while written with aristocratic grace) extremely, shall we say, *colorful* stuff, leaving the nature of the relationship in little doubt (and making the nature of the writer's tastes in certain intimate matters pretty clear too). For added color, the mistress may be identifiable as a politically unwise association for the writer, or the letters could let slip some secrets of state. Incidentally, it's best to set this up so that the rogue who got hold of the box is illiterate or semi-literate (hence Old Henry's role), but more to the point, the letters themselves are unsigned; it's the crest on the box that gives the game away. (Or *perhaps* it's a red herring; the box was a gift to an underling or was lost at cards, and the writer, while high-ranking, wasn't who Old Henry has guessed. This might help explain how a thief in a remote, pirate-infested area got hold of it, which is something that will need some explanation.)

Regardless, suddenly what had seemed like a good prize is a hot potato instead. Wise folk would put the letters back in the box, add some heavy stones, and drop it in the nearest bay, but the chance for profit is probably more than any rogue can resist. Or perhaps the political implications of these letters are such that even a pirate feels obliged to intervene. The PCs could be the original thieves, law enforcers suddenly receiving dark and ambiguous hints from Very High Places about their latest instructions, other rogues, smarter than the original thieves, asked for help by Old Henry when the business starts to get out of hand, or independent agents recruited by one of the several factions involved the affair and paid to be very discrete about it.

- **Emissary:** Sometimes, messages have to be taken from low places to high. The problem is usually finding a suitable messenger. When a certain pirate wants to negotiate terms for turning himself in to the authorities, saving his neck and his fortune by handing over information or something else important (perhaps those letters from the last scenario), or perhaps gaining official status as a privateer, his thoughts turn to Old Henry. It's a somewhat risky job, but Old Henry can present himself as a mere messenger with no crimes of his own to answer for, and anyway, the pay is tempting. However, Old Henry requires an escort as part of the bargain. The PCs get this job; if they're on the side of the law, their role is arranged as part of the preliminary deal, if they're legitimate freelancers, they're hired as dependable neutral parties, and if they're known rogues, they receive a safe conduct (hopefully reliable) from the authorities. (In the latter case, the fact that the pirate captain doesn't send members of his own crew may say something about the deal he's arranging.)

The PCs may be a little surprised by the transformation in Old Henry, once he has good reason and a little spending money, but they probably always thought that he was a bit upper-class if they've known him long. The mission itself is going to have more complications (and probably more surprises) than that, though; the deal quite likely has clauses that even Old Henry hasn't been told about, and there may well be third parties who'll try and intervene. Old Henry's advice on etiquette may prove essential; it may also display embarrassing flaws, given that he learned manners as a servant, not as a nobleman.

- **Old Friendships:** Old Henry comes to various of his piratical associates (possibly including the PCs) with interesting news; he says he's recognized a certain wealthy fellow recently arrived in town, who's apparently looking to set up in a plantation or farm locally. Although he's changed his name, he used to be a notorious magistrate in another port; an evil-minded, vicious, pirate-hating piece of work, with a great love of the noose. If anyone mutters that it sounds like something should be done about this fellow, Old Henry won't disagree. However, at the same time, he's going to some of the local land-based thieves and saying that he hears that this same individual is even richer than he looks, and the strongbox in his room might repay investigation . . .

Actually, most of this is Old Henry's invention. He has indeed recognized the subject of all these rumors that he's spreading -- but only as the "young master" who lost him his job years ago. Suddenly burning with the desire for revenge, Old Henry will risk a great deal and say anything to make life hard for this individual. Wherever the PCs stand, in the underworld, in law enforcement, or perhaps as guards or friends to Old Henry's target, they'll get caught up in the ensuing chaos. Old Henry has a painfully efficient grasp of how to manipulate his contacts. Eventually, he may either flee the area, become the object of several very dangerous people's annoyance, or make an insanely risky direct attack on his old enemy. Whether the aristocrat in question is still the spoiled oaf who Henry remembers, or whether he's mellowed with time, is up to the GM.

Murphy's Rules



by John Kovalic

Murphy's Rules



Murphy's Rules



Dork Tower!



Dork Tower!



Pyramid Pick

Lost Cities: Daring Adventure for Two

Published by [Rio Grande Games](#)

Created by Reiner Knizia

Card game with board; \$19.95

ISBN: 1-892081-23-7

As far as I can tell, Reiner Knizia doesn't know how to design a bad game, and *Lost Cities* is no exception to his exemplary track record.

Although connected to the reputed theme of the game (adventurers traveling to *Lost Cities* around the globe) in only the loosest of possible fashions, the mechanics here prove to be simple, but not simplistic: To borrow the cliché, *Lost Cities* is easy to learn, difficult to master.

Despite the fact that it comes with a board, *Lost Cities* is essentially a card game: You have five different color suits (each belonging to a different environment in which a lost city is located), with each suit containing three "investment" cards and ten cards numbered from 1 to 10. Each player receives a hand of eight cards, and play proceeds in turns, with each player either playing or discarding a card, and then drawing another card in order to replace it.

Cards are played off of the board (which has five playing areas keyed to each of the five colors), with each player playing on his or her side of the board. Cards must be played in order, with investment cards coming first, and then the numerical cards in order after that. (So, in other words, if you've played the red seven, you cannot go back and play the red five; you can only play the red eight, nine, or ten.) When you decide to discard a card (rather than playing), you do so into one of five discard piles (keyed to each of the colors). When you draw a card you may do so from the top of any of the discard piles, or from the top of the draw pile. The game ends when the last card is drawn from the draw pile.

You score each color separately in the following manner: Total the numerical cards, subtract 20 from the resulting total, and multiply that total (whether its positive or negative) by the number of investment cards you played plus one. If you didn't play any cards in a color (investment or numerical), however, your score for that column is 0. Then add the totals from all five colors together.

Simple, right? Right. But in the actual practice of it, *Lost Cities* becomes something more than you'd expect.

For example, it's not enough to merely play cards out in a haphazard manner: You must be aware of your ability to reach the 20 point minimum required to see a return (otherwise you're throwing your money away). You must balance the risks and advantages of additional investment in an exploration. You must keep in mind how much time you have left in the game, and attempt to manipulate that time limit to your advantage (and your opponent's disadvantage) through your discards and draws.

And then there is the direct player interaction through the five discard piles, which takes a difficult decision and turns it into a nerve-wracking one: You must play to your strengths, subvert your opponents, and avoid your weaknesses.

The incredibly diverse array of tactical options and strategic possibilities which result from the elegantly simple mechanics of *Lost Cities* is a testament to Knizia's brilliance at game design, and the strength of this game. This is a

game in which you will be asked to choose between the lesser of two evils, and forced to decide between the conservative and the risky.

In addition to being a great two-player game, *Lost Cities* is also a visually beautiful package (although the white "map" on the superfluous playing board comes off as far too bluish, leaving you momentarily confused the first time you look at the game board). There is little doubt that this game is well worth the cost of admission, and should prove a worthy addition to your collection of games.

-- *Justin Bacon*

Pyramid Pick

Unseen Masters: Modern Struggles Against Hidden Powers (for Call of Cthulhu)

Published by [Chaosium, Inc.](#)

Written by Bruce Ballon

Art by Matt Harpold, Paul Carrick, & Drashi Khendup

216 pages; \$23.95

In comparison with the classic period of the 1920s, the modern day has seen relatively scant coverage from Chaosium for their venerable RPG, *Call of Cthulhu*. This is not to belittle their releases for the modern day such as *Utatti Asfet*, *The Stars Are Right*, or *The Resection of Time*, but many feel that none have come close to Pagan Publishing's *Delta Green* setting and books in terms of tone and feel. Yet now Chaosium have published a contemporary set campaign that can justifiably said to come very close.

Unseen Masters is a book containing three scenarios set in modern day New York, in which the investigators are up against shadowy conspiracies and hidden powers. Since they are all based in New York, they can form the basic structure to a campaign. Further, the second two adventures are designed with loose structures, allowing other scenarios to be played between events, and can thus be played as mini-campaign themselves. This makes *Unseen Masters* into something of a hybrid book between the traditional anthologies of individual scenarios (such as *The Stars are Right*) and the classic onionskin campaigns exemplified by *Masks of Nyarlathotep*.

Behind Matt Harpold's eerie cover, *Unseen Masters* is up to Chaosium's usual standard of presentation. Stalwart Paul Carrick's internal art is as good as ever, and Drashi Khendup's cartography thankfully fails to grate as in previous books. There is a solid index and seventeen pages of handouts, some of which the Keeper will have lots of fun with. The book is text-heavy, though not a heavy read. That said, in a couple of places, the author's phrasing is a little too colloquial to my mind.

Designed specifically for the experienced player and Keeper alike, both will get more enjoyment out of *Unseen Masters* if they have played through some of Chaosium's classic campaigns, such as *Masks of Nyarlathotep*, *Day of the Beast*, and *At Your Door*. The author draws heavily upon these and other influences, which he acknowledges in the book. These include Kolchak; The Night Stalker, The Exorcist and The Hunger; the works of authors - Mythos (Lovecraft, Bloch, Campbell, Klein) and not (Tolkien, Philip K. Dick, Umberto Eco); and numerous *Call of Cthulhu* supplements. Besides Chaosium's own, the works of Pagan Publishing (*Delta Green*), Triad (*Lurking Fears*) and T.O.M.E. (*Whispers from the Abyss and Glozel est Authentique!*) are all referenced. By drawing upon these books, and particularly *Call of Cthulhu*'s own internal history, the author has given the adventures in *Unseen Masters* a solid foundation.

(SPOILER ALERT!)

The first adventure is The Wild Hunt, which opens with the investigators, as outside consultants or FBI agents, being asked by the NYPD to help catch the serial killer that has struck in the fictional SoHo district of Manhattan. The players will be worked hard in this adventure, particularly those that like the nitty gritty of an investigation. There is a lot of information to uncover and process, including plenty of red herrings. The Keeper also plenty to get his teeth into, especially during the investigative sequences that take the players into the S&M, Goth, and vampire sub-cultures.

Pleasingly, these sections are handled with great care and sensitivity by the author.

Like the subsequent adventures, *The Wild Hunt* is structured into numbered sections that count up to the culprit. These present possible paths of investigation, but do not restrict the players to a linear course of action. Whilst they are free to pursue lines of questioning as they see fit, time can be short as the true masters and their nefarious pawns are invariably working to their own agendas. Though it appears at first that the investigators face a conventional threat, behind this is a Mythos race rarely seen outside of single individuals. Whilst I will not go so far as to name them, it is a pleasure to see them used as something more - as an Unseen Master.

The Wild Hunt is the most traditional of the *Call of Cthulhu* scenarios in this book. The Mythos has always contained a strong element of the impersonal, and rightly so. Yet the second scenario, *The Truth Shall Set You Free*, goes the other way and makes the Mythos very personal. It asks a question right out of a Philip K. Dick novel "What is truth?" and applies it to a single investigator. Can what they are seeing be real, or are the other investigators the mad ones? This adventure takes time to set up and play through. It is here that *Unseen Masters* expands into a meta-campaign as other scenarios are played. Those from *Secrets and Last Rites* are suggested, but non-Mythos adventures could equally effective. This calls for clever roleplaying from both Keeper and the victim, who may be willing or unwilling; the book giving guidelines for both. The second half of *The Truth Shall Set You Free* concentrates on the attempts to get help for the victim, while other forces seek to further or enhance his weakening grip on reality. Though the shortest of the three adventures in *Unseen Masters*, this is really evil and very well written. The section on psychiatry and psychology included at the beginning of *Unseen Masters* will be particular use in both this adventure and the next.

The last adventure, *Coming of Age*, is as equally vile as *The Truth Shall Set You Free*, but its evil is more insidious and comes from a completely different direction right into an investigator's home. To say more would spoil it, but the villains of this piece have very strong links to Chaosium classics -- *Masks of Nyarlathotep*, *Day of the Beast*, and *Shadows of Yog-Sothoth*. Should seasoned players realize whom they are facing, then their own sanity should be at risk! Some of the scenes in *Coming of Age* are deliciously evil and should set any Keeper salivating at the thought of unleashing them on his players.

(END SPOILER)

Unseen Masters is a fantastic new addition for *Call of Cthulhu* in the modern day. Not only is the best release from Chaosium since their mammoth *Beyond the Mountains of Madness*, but it is the most contemporary of any release for the game in some time. In particular this is a must for any *Delta Green* Keeper as it is set in New York (home of *Delta Green*'s *The Fate*) and is very suitable for Federal Agents. Indeed, *Unseen Masters* devotes one of its appendices to adapting all three adventures to *Delta Green*. This is welcome advice, but does not necessarily have to be adhered to the *Delta Green* game unless the Keeper is a purist. This may not be as good as the *Delta Green* books themselves, but Bruce Ballou has come very close in this superb set of three adventures, and for that he should be applauded.

-- Matthew Pook

Pyramid Pick

Witch Trial Card Game

Published by [Cheapass Games](#)

Designed by James Ernest

Illustrated by Charles Dana Gibson

84 cards, 1 board, and a rulesheet; \$6.00

It is the late seventeenth century in America. You are a lawyer, you are convinced that Mad Gertie Hayes is guilty of the Ol' Hokus-Pokus, and you are going to make sure the jury is convinced as well. You bring into evidence that Mad Gertie keeps bad company and that she is known to read without moving her lips. The jury seems to agree, but your opposition, a sly defense attorney, presents Mad Gertie's friends as character witnesses and relates that Mad Gertie regularly works with children. The jury sways towards the defense, but you have one final trick up your sleeve. You point out that, even in today's noon sun, Mad Gertie casts no shadow! Aghast, the jury finds Mad Gertie guilty, sends her to her fate and, most importantly, you collect the court fees for a successful prosecution.

If this sounds like a fun evening, then Cheapass Games first release in 2001, the card game *Witch Trial*, will appeal to your inner-barrister. Set around the time of the Salem witch trials, three to seven lawyers prosecute and defend suspects who are charged, not with witchcraft, but with related crimes such as drinking, pilfering, and golf. Whoever wins the case also keeps the court fees. The player with the most money after all the suspects are tried wins the game.

Money is not simply a method of keeping score; it also helps lawyers win cases. Each player begins with a hand of five cards, but for the rest of the game, players get new cards by purchasing them from five face-up choices. An attorney can take the oldest card for free, but if a valuable new card turns up, she or he may have to pay through the nose to grab it.

After assembling strong hands, players begin to try cases. A lawyer can create a case by matching a Charge card, such as "Frowning," to a Suspect card, like "Meek Little Sarah." The lawyer becomes the Prosecution for this case. Another player may decide to defend the case, thus becoming the Defense. If there are no willing defenders, the prosecution can force a random player to assume the Defense.

A trial consists of each side playing Evidence cards to sway the Jury. The Jury is represented by a number, one through 12. The higher the number, the more convinced the Jury is of the Suspect's guilt. The Prosecution goes first, playing Evidence cards that add to the Jury number. Once the Prosecution rests, the Defense may play Evidence cards to subtract from the Jury number. When the Defense rests, the Prosecution gets one final argument; a last card. When both sides are done presenting Evidence, the Prosecution rolls two dice and if the total of the dice plus the Jury number is thirteen or greater, then the Prosecution wins. Otherwise, the Defense wins the case. Each Charge has a dollar value which goes from the bank to the winner.

Evidence is only one part of a trial. Players can also play Motion cards which allow them to do such things as bribe the jury, cross-examine another player's hand, or leave the case. Players can change the original Charge to a lesser or greater offense. A lawyer may call other Suspects to testify which will help his or her case with a successful die roll. Finally, when all else fails, players can plea-bargain, agreeing to split the Charge's dollar value as they see fit and sending the Jury home.

The components of the game are of higher quality than many previous Cheapass releases. The cards are glossy and

sturdy, and the game is packaged in a cardboard box, a new feature Cheapass revealed at GenCon 2000. The only shortcoming is the art. Cheapass chose Gibson's clip art which is in the public domain (they don't call themselves Cheapass for nothing) and while it is fairly high quality, it is also about 200 years too modern; this makes the theme of colonial America a little inconsistent. This does not affect the game play, though, which is full of logic, bluffing, and not a little bit of roleplaying.

Perhaps the most interesting mechanic is *Witch Trial* is the method by which players get new cards. First, players often have to spend money to get desirable cards, yet having the most money wins the game. So each player must perform a cost/benefit analysis before buying a card. Second, all of the other players can see which card the buyer is taking. By paying attention, players will know who is building a strong Prosecution hand, who is building a strong Defense hand, and who has cards that aid in forcing a plea bargain. In fact, the threat of a card is often more powerful than actually playing the card.

The game scales well from three to seven players, but with more players the time between turns can become a bit long. Players will enjoy trying to out-guess each other when choosing Evidence cards and trying to play Motion cards when they will have the greatest effect. Negotiations during a plea bargain can become quite intense, depending on how much each player knows about the other's hand. Finally, players with a penchant for drama will enjoy explaining exactly why the Widow Shelly is guilty of public lewdness and how her faithful pet helps prove her guilt. *Witch Trial* is the best of Cheapass Games' most recent offerings.

-- Brad Weier

Untouchable: The Cleveland Torso Killer

"Of all the horrible nightmares come to life, the most shuddering is the fiend who decapitates his victims in the dark, dank recesses of Kingsbury Run. That a man of this nature should be permitted to work his crazed vengeance upon six people in a city the size of Cleveland should be the city's shame. No Edgar Allan Poe in his deepest, opium-maddened dream could conceive horror so painstakingly worked out . . ."

-- Editorial in the *Cleveland News* in September, 1936

He almost certainly doubled [Jack the Ripper's](#) total, and may have more than quadrupled it; estimates of his death toll range between a significant thirteen and twenty-three victims, with outlying speculation running all the way to forty or more. To a Depression-era Cleveland police department barely advanced from Victorian Scotland Yard techniques, he was uncatchable, adapting to the harsh rhythms and rules of the underclass and the underworld and using them to cover his tracks even while he boasted of his crimes. He was, in short, the first modern serial killer in America, setting the archetype for decades to come -- and perhaps it was fitting that his nemesis was the other American archetype of the 20th century, the G-Man himself, Eliot Ness. He was the Kingsbury Run Butcher, the Cleveland Torso Killer -- and he remains uncaught to this day.

"[T]he bodies of two white men, both beheaded, lying in the weeds; both bodies were naked except that one of them had socks on . . . After an extensive search the heads of both men were found . . . buried in separate places, one about 20 feet away from one of the bodies and the other head was buried about 75 feet away from the other body. . . . It was apparent that oil, acid or some chemical was poured over one of the bodies as it was burnt to quite an extent; it was also evident that both bodies had been there several days as they had started to decompose."

-- from the police report of Detectives Emil Musil and Orly May, September 23, 1935

With these words, the official Cleveland Police files on the Cleveland Torso Killer begin. The two bodies appeared in a prehistoric creek bed known as Kingsbury Run, a "cut" through Cleveland occupied by railroad tracks, waste land, and "hobo jungles," dark and overgrown even in the daytime. To the east of the Run, the "Roaring Third" contained all the vice and misery of Whitechapel in its prime; at its north end in the Cuyahoga Flats rested one of Depression America's largest shantytowns. The Cleveland police department, meanwhile, was legendarily corrupt and antiquated, owned by the Democratic machine and the local mobs. It was a location, in other words, ready-made for serial murder.

However, it took the discovery of four more bodies between January and September of 1936 to make that apparent to the Cleveland police. Only one of the four was ever identified (photographic fingerprint reconstruction determined she was local barmaid and prostitute Florence Polillo), despite the ornate tattoos on one dismembered corpse. In all cases, the bodies had been idiosyncratically decapitated, and were usually dismembered, drained of blood, and washed in a chemical preservative -- all to conceal the time of death and the victims' identities. The preservative triggered a memory for the coroner, Arthur Pearse -- in September of 1934, a woman's decapitated body doused with the same chemical had washed up on the shore of Lake Erie -- could the killer have begun with a "practice" before transferring his attention to Kingsbury Run? With the sixth (counting the "Lady in the Lake," the seventh) killing, the police put Detective Peter Merylo in charge full time, and kicked off the biggest manhunt in Cleveland history.

"Jim, you've got a real problem on your hands. The same guy did them all. Too much similarity to be coincidental. Death by decapitation. The expert hand with a knife. Bodies all cleaned up and neat. I can't tell you why he kills women one way and men another, but it's the same man, I guarantee you."

-- Eliot Ness, June 7, 1936

The killings weren't only an embarrassment to the police and to the city (the "Tattooed Man" was found in front of a police station two days before the 1936 Republican National Convention was due to open), but to the city's newly-appointed Director of Public Safety, Eliot Ness. Fresh from his triumph as head of the "Untouchable" squad who brought down Al Capone in Chicago, Ness had been hand-picked by Republican Mayor Harold Burton to clean up Cleveland's civic cesspool. The last thing he needed was a Mad Butcher slaughtering "nobodies" to distract him -- and the press -- from the war on corruption and rackets. But although Ness successfully prosecuted the largest graft scandal in Cleveland history, broke the back of the gambling and labor rackets, and reorganized Cleveland's traffic control

system (saving hundreds of lives per year), he couldn't shake -- and couldn't touch -- the Torso Killer. During 1937, the Butcher struck three more times, and raised his known toll to eleven by February of 1938. On August 16, 1938, the killer left two more bodies in sight of Ness' office window. Desperate, Ness struck back. Unable to catch the killer, he resolved to remove the victims. Shortly after midnight on August 18, 1938, Ness and 35 police officers swept through the hobo jungles of the Flats, jailing every drifter there and burning the shantytown to the ground. However, the Butcher had won the press war; the papers turned against the "Boy Wonder" for his "Gestapo tactics" in the raid, and his campaign for mayor of Cleveland ended in disaster. Although Ness made no arrest in the case, the Cleveland Torso Killer never struck again.

"About twenty minutes past three o'clock yesterday afternoon Frederick Wildborn, a carpenter employed by Messrs. J. Grover and Sons, builders of Pimlico, who are the contractors for the new Metropolitan Police headquarters on the Thames Embankment, was working on the foundation, when he came across a neatly done up parcel in one of the cellars. It was opened, and the body of a woman, very much decomposed, was found carefully wrapped in a piece of what is supposed to be a black petticoat. The trunk was without head, arms, or legs, and presented a horrible spectacle."

-- "Another Ghastly Discovery in London," *Pall Mall Gazette*, Oct. 3, 1888

Unless, of course, he did. Three bodies turned up in the Lake Erie Rail Yards in McKees Rocks, Pennsylvania on May 3, 1940, bearing some of the Torso Killer's signature wounds. Other beheaded victims in New Castle, Pennsylvania, Youngstown, Ohio, Pittsburgh, and again in Cleveland raised Merylo's personal estimation of the total to twenty-three, although he was finally taken off the case on October 1, 1942. Investigators looking into the Black Dahlia killing in Los Angeles in 1947 were intrigued by the similarity of the knife wounds, bisected bodies, and an anonymous 1938 letter claiming the Torso Killer had gone to "sunny California for the winter" and announcing another killing near where the Dahlia's body would be found nine years later. Even more tenuously, one can extend the killings back in time to the Ripper era, when three mutilated torsos appeared in London between October of 1888 and June of 1889 -- fifty years before the Torso killings stopped.

"I felt bad operating on those people but science must advance. I shall soon astound the medical profession . . . What did their lives mean in comparison to hundreds of sick and disease twisted bodies. Just laboratory guinea pigs found on any public street. No one missed them when I failed. My last case was successful. I know now the feeling of Pasteur, Thoreau, and other pioneers . . . They called me mad and a butcherer but 'the truth will out'."

-- Letter signed "X," sent to Cleveland Police Chief Matowitz on Dec. 21, 1938

Both the Ripper and the Butcher were theoretically medical men, although both official investigations note that a butcher or hunter could have caused the same wounds with their own specialized knowledges. Eliot Ness, in fact, believed he had identified the murderer as one Dr. Francis E. Sweeney, a bisexual, alcoholic, possibly psychotic surgeon of great physical gifts, born and raised in the Kingsbury Run area. Ness brought Sweeney in for polygraph interrogation on August 23, 1938; Ness later said that in his entire career he had never felt as threatened as when he was alone in that room with Sweeney. Unfortunately, Sweeney's cousin was the powerful Democratic Congressman Martin L. Sweeney, a political enemy of Ness' -- without proof, Ness couldn't prosecute him. Dr. Sweeney checked himself into a mental hospital two days later, occasionally sending Ness taunting postcards. He outlived Eliot Ness by ten years.

"'Both bodies have been totally drained of blood.' 'Really?' 'Totally drained.' 'What does that mean?' 'It means that there is no blood in these bodies.'"

-- Pearce and Myrlo, in *Torso*, by Brian Michael Bendis and Marc Andreyko

The medical theory spawns the "eugenic Frankenstein" theory; the anonymous "X letter" claims the Butcher was working on an elixir of life or some vast medical breakthrough. The draining of blood, of course, implies vampires (or at least it does to S.A. Swinarski in his novel *The Flesh, The Blood, and The Fire*) -- as do the beheadings, unless the Gathering of Highlanders took place in Cleveland in the 1930s. Merylo investigated all manner of "crazies," including a "Voodoo Doctor with a death ray," and a number of "covens of self-proclaimed witches and warlocks" in the words of Steven Nickel's relatively unsensationalistic book *Torso*. (Brian Michael Bendis and Marc Andreyko's rather less accurate, but superbly evocative graphic novel *Torso* endorses a combination Sweeney-eugenicist theory.) The video

game *The Black Dahlia* ties the Killer not only to the Dahlia but to the Nazi occultists -- and indeed, one of the McKees Rocks victims had the word "NAZI" carved into his back. The supernatural boils through the Kingsbury Run, then, suitable for any dark game of horror. However, nobody seems to have noted what, to me, is the most disturbing, if faint, parallel, one for any *Unknown Armies* GM to look into.

Perhaps gruesomely appropriate for a story beginning with a Lady in the Lake, the killings seem a horrible underside to some proto-Arthurian sacrifice myth. The bodies, maimed in streams to echo the Fisher King; the first two dead men with hidden identities as recapitulations of Balan and Balin who killed each other unknowing, the "piebald" Percival as the "Tattooed Man." The two identified women are connected by blood and names; Flo Polillo echoes Florée (bride of Gawain), and Rose Wallace recalls Gawain's brother Gareth's paramour, the Lady of the Rose. There may be a connection to the protective, watchful Head of Bran in the "death mask" police mounted on the wall of the train station. And we mustn't forget our frustrated witness Eliot, and the deaths scattered across the Waste Land so evocatively named Kingsbury Run. The echoes recur; the killings muffled by the "sound of horns and motors" in the railroad yards, the bodies "stretched out on those red rocks," the "drowned sailors," the corpses buried in the garden, cities turned upside down. Fear death by water.

Polls and Cons

Well, in accordance with prophecy (or at least last week's column), I visited the Game Invasion convention in Jacksonville last weekend, and a good time was had by all. I got to meet Jolly Blackburn and participate in a live *Knights of the Dinner Table* reading (appearing, alternately, as Bob and Dave). And I also got my copy of *KotDT* #1 signed . . . once I could coax the \$100 book out of my hand. (How many other folks get their RPG books signed, anyway? It's very common in the comic world, notso common in the gaming biz . . .)

And, after coming back, I've been working tirelessly (well, okay, I've been nodding off every now and then) trying to catch up with correspondence, slushpiles, etc. So for those of you who've been waiting for a reply, I appreciate your patience. I'll definitely try to get to you all soon. And I'll try to write some meatier columns once I get caught up.

As an aside, if you have a quick question you'd like to know the answer to, you may want to consider visiting the [Pyramid chat](#). I visit there almost every day, generally in the evenings. And, of course, there are lots of other cool and interesting folks who dwell there.

* * *

Funny story time:

On my vacation, between visiting my parents in Fort Lauderdale and the Game Invasion convention in Jacksonville, I made a pit stop back home in Tallahassee. This was last Thursday night, before the magazine's upload. So I finished up my column, posted it, and put in a new poll.

Unfortunately, I forgot to mention to anyone else that I had uploaded a new poll.

Making matters worse was the fact that the previous week's poll and the newly submitted poll were similar; the prior poll asked how many people you have in your gaming group (an objective question), while the new poll asked what you thought about the size of your group (a subjective question). Thus while I generally have 2-3 people in my group, I often felt my groups were undersized by a person or two. I was curious if other people had similar reactions.

Now, since I was busily working and sleeping between vacation destinations, I wasn't around in the chat room for the magazine's upload. Unfortunately, owing to the madcap pace that is upload night, a cursory glance of the poll made it look like I hadn't changed it from last week. So at two minutes past midnight, with the new magazine uploaded, panic ensues: "Oh, no! The poll hasn't been changed!" (I'm guessing here with a creative reenactment; in actuality, I suspect the cursing of my name was also prominent.)

So our fearless webmasters tackled someone in the chat room to come up with a new poll: Steve Jackson.

Steve, having been reprogrammed just like I was when I saw it, based a poll around the previous day's [Daily Illuminator](#):

February 22, 2001: All Your Base Are Belong To Us

We get signal.

Techno signal.

All your base (your base) (base) (base) All your base. Are belong to us.

The best part is, [this](#) was inspired by a game. Zerowing.

All your base.
Are belong.
To us.

The poll itself may not have been bad . . . if only my standard "Other" feature hadn't been included.

So when I woke up the next morning, I checked my email . . . and found about forty emails from folks saying, "What the @#!\$ is the poll about?" "Huh?" "I don't get it." "This is the kind of poll I'm paying for?" etc.

And as I'm reading these bewildered and annoyed emails over, I'm scratching my head (which, for its part, had begun to peel because of the long-standing natural hatred between redheads and Mr. Sun). "Jeepers," I thought, "I didn't think it was *that* odd a question . . . I must've really phrased it poorly . . ."

And then I checked out the poll. And I'm staring at the screen, feeling like a character living the last five minutes of a *Twilight Zone* episode.

So for everyone who was confused by last week's poll . . . IT'S NOT MY FAULT! Blame the guy who signs my paychecks! (*I'm sure not going to . . .*)

So anyway, being an optimist, I'm going to interpret at least part of the results as "Do you check the [Daily Illuminator](#) every day?" And for at least 14% of you, I'm going to guess the answer is "No." (The poll I originally asked should run next week; I may well ask the Daily Illuminator question for real at some point.)

Oh, and for those of you looking for more information on the whole AYBABTU phenomenon, a good starting point is <http://hubert.retrogames.com/history.htm>.

-- *Steven Marsh*

* * *

*Last week's answer: **Masque of the Red Death** boxed set, **Red Jack** book, p. 8.*

*(Two stars) "However, no action is to be taken until after the *Titanic* strikes the iceberg at approximately 11:40pm on Sunday, April 14. On no account initiate any incident which might jeopardize this. The mission ends when the *Titanic* sinks and you clock back."*

The FBI in Gaming

by Darren Watts

Introduction

"Fidelity. Bravery. Integrity."
-- The FBI's official motto

The Federal Bureau of Investigation might play a role in any campaign set in the United States in the past century. No government agency has such a high profile in popular fiction, partly due to the intense self-promotion it has carried out since the days of mobsters and tommy guns. It makes an imposing enemy for lawbreakers, a marvelous background for characters of any stripe, and can serve as the employer/motivating force for entire campaigns of wildly varying styles. All too often, however, the fictional portrayals of "The B" (as its agents refer to it) feature some massive factual boners. Here an effort has been made to give a realistic description of the FBI in the "real world" with an eye towards gaming relevance; of course, in any specific game setting its activities, powers and history may vary.

The first and most obvious use of this article is in plot design; PCs are forever doing things that bring them into contact or conflict with the law, and the FBI investigates such a wide variety of crimes that eventually some interaction is almost inevitable. Another use is in character design. If you're playing a group of FBI agents (or agents of a similar fictitious organization), the descriptions will help you fill in appropriate skills and advantages. A concise timeline and online references are also provided.

Timeline

- 1870-1908** Prior to 1908, the Department of Justice (itself founded in 1870) has no investigative branch, only financial "examiners" to help investigate the primary crimes defined as "federal" at the time, such as bankruptcies and business fraud. When legwork is needed in handling these cases, the DOJ hires private investigators such as the Pinkerton Detectives or "borrows" agents from the Secret Service.
- 1908** Charles Bonaparte, Attorney General for President Theodore Roosevelt, hires a small handful of "Special Agents" to investigate full-time for the Justice Department, and has them report to the "Chief Examiner," Stanley Finch. Eventually this core of agents, which expands in number tremendously over the next fifteen years, becomes known as the FBI.
- 1910** Congress passes the Mann Act, which attempts to combat the menace of prostitution and "white slavery" by making it illegal to transport a woman or minor across state lines for "immoral purposes." As a side effect, the Mann Act gives teeth to federal laws involving the investigation of interstate crimes and the prosecution of fugitives.
- 1912** A. Bruce Bielaski is named the second Chief Examiner and head of the Bureau.
- 1917** On the eve of America entering World War I ("The Great War"), the FBI is given responsibility by President Woodrow Wilson to investigating violations of the Espionage, Sabotage and Selective Service Acts.
- 1919** William J. Flynn is appointed the Director of the FBI, the first to use that title.
- 1921** William J. Burns is named the fourth Director of the FBI.
- 1924** J. Edgar Hoover becomes the Director of the FBI. Under his regime the Bureau greatly expands its power

and prestige. Hoover is exceptionally good at publicity, and his relentless promotion of his own organization in the press and popular media, especially during the era of Prohibition and mobsters, creates the enduring image of the two-fisted, "untouchable" G-Man. (Hoover is also very good at making himself covertly useful to the Executive Branch, increasing his own influence by providing Presidents from Roosevelt to Nixon with information about subversive elements and political enemies.)

- 1932** Kidnapping is made a federal crime.
- 1934** Concerns about organized crime spur Congress to allow FBI agents to make arrests and carry firearms.
- 1935** Hoover founds the FBI Academy at Quantico, largely ending the practice of recruiting agents with police backgrounds in favor of training their own.
- 1940** With the specter of World War II looming over the US, Congress passes a law making it a federal crime to "advocate violent overthrow of the government." This was the justification used first by President Roosevelt to have the FBI begin covert investigation into "subversive" groups (which itself led to the COINTELPRO scandals of the 1970s; see below.) Also, a subdivision of the FBI is created, called the Special Intelligence Service, to combat German espionage in Latin America for the duration of the war.
- 1946** Congress passes the Atomic Energy Act, which specifically requires the FBI to "determine the loyalty of individuals with access to Atomic Energy secrets." Armed with this new mandate, the FBI devotes tremendous time and resources in the late 1940s and 1950s to ferreting out Communists in government service.
- 1960-1971** The FBI expands its programs combating subversive organizations, under the umbrella of "Counter Intelligence Projects" or COINTELPRO. The social turmoil of the Sixties and especially the fear of riots, bombings and other sabotage leads to frequent covert investigations by the FBI against controversial people and groups like Martin Luther King, Abbie Hoffman, John Lennon, the Nation of Islam, and the Weathermen.
- 1963** President Kennedy is assassinated. The crime is investigated at first as a local homicide by the Dallas police, because murdering the President was not at the time a federal crime; Lyndon Johnson issues an Executive Order a few days later allowing the FBI to get involved, and the law is changed in 1964.
- 1970** The Racketeer-Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act (RICO) is passed into law, giving the FBI a powerful weapon against organized crime by allowing disparate accusations of crimes by a group to be investigated and prosecuted together.
- 1971** NBC reporter Carl Stern files a set of Freedom Of Information Act requests about investigations by the FBI against American Leftist groups, leading to embarrassing revelations about the FBI's illegal wiretapping activities.
- 1972** J Edgar Hoover dies after 48 years as Director. His immediate successor, L. Patrick Gray, serves as Acting Director until being caught in the tangle of Watergate amid accusations of destroying documents and obstructing the investigation.
- 1973** Clarence Kelly, former FBI agent himself and then-police chief of Kansas City, becomes Director with a mandate to "clean up" the Bureau and cooperate with Congress' investigations into alleged COINTELPRO abuses. (The FBI itself maintains that the program was ended in 1971.) The Senate Select Committee holds hearings through 1976, but though several activities of the past are condemned, no files are charged and the Senate seems satisfied that the programs have been discontinued.
- 1978** Kelly resigns. William Webster takes over as Director and oversees the expansion of FBI efforts in battling drug-related crime, counterterrorism, and the Savings & Loan scandals of the 1980s.

- 1987** Webster resigns to move laterally over to head of the CIA, and William Sessions is selected as Director. Sessions is considered an outsider by the rank and file of the Bureau, and there is occasional open antagonism among the senior staffers.
- 1992** An FBI sniper accidentally kills the wife of federal fugitive Randy Weaver during a tense standoff at Ruby Ridge, Idaho.
- 1993** The FBI is accused of mishandling the standoff with David Koresh and his followers when their compound burns down in Waco, Texas.
- 1993** Sessions is removed by President Clinton in 1993 over ethics violations (building a fence around his house with FBI funds and flying his wife for free on government flights.) Louis Freeh is named Director, with the mission of restoring public confidence in the FBI and streamlining the organization for the future. He begins cutting staffing and reorganizing departments.
- 1995** The Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City is bombed, and the FBI leads the investigation.
- 1996** The FBI is accused by several former employees of gross mishandling of evidence at their laboratories, including some charges of intentionally favoring the prosecution in criminal cases.

Organizational Personality

The FBI generally inspires a fair amount of institutional loyalty. Partly this is a holdover from the Hoover days, when the FBI seemed to operate without much Congressional oversight and the media helped further the pristine image of the forthright, brave, two-fisted agent battling the forces of organized crime. There is no doubt that the Bureau remains the premiere crimefighting organization in the world in terms of resources, prestige, and authority. However, the 1990s were a period of intense second-guessing of Bureau procedures and policies, and in many cases the agency has hunkered down and developed a "bunker mentality" against its critics.

Critics of the FBI point out that they have the lowest rate of conviction and highest rate of declined prosecutions of any government agency, and have been accused of "selective prosecution" in support of various political agendas. Further, FBI agents have a perception within government circles for being "cowboys," preferring the action of "cops & robbers" and showy drug busts to the methodical building of cases against white-collar offenders and corporate criminals. The Bureau also has still not entirely escaped the shadow of the revelation of the COINTELPRO abuses, and some believe programs like this continue against leftist organizations like Earth First! and the opponents of the World Trade Organization.

Despite the public black eyes of Ruby Ridge and Waco, FBI recruitment is still tremendously successful. (No doubt, the popularity of shows like *The X-Files* and movies like *Silence of the Lambs* are at least partly responsible for this.)

Structure and Jurisdiction

Of all the federal law-enforcement agencies, the FBI has the broadest mandate; basically, it investigates all federal crimes not expressly assigned to another agency. This includes over 200 types of crimes, meaning an FBI background can cover the widest possible range of possible duties and skills. GMs can pit agents against organized crime families, drug smugglers, bank robbers, or domestic terrorist groups, dealing with crimes as prosaic as smuggling or kidnapping or as convoluted and challenging as white-collar embezzlement. FBI agents also investigate crimes such as child pornography, consumer product tampering, telemarketing fraud, or toxic waste-dumping. Any crime occurring on a Native American reservation is also the purview of the Bureau, as are violations of the Civil Rights Act and Equal Credit Opportunity Act. And, of course, there are always threats against the President, Vice-president, or members of Congress to investigate. FBI PCs should never be bored.

In addition to investigation, the FBI has a couple of other major responsibilities. As the best-funded law-enforcement

agency in the country, they naturally have the best infrastructures and databases, which they are expected to maintain and share with other federal agencies or state or local officials as needed. The Bureau administers the National Crime Information Center (which provides information to law-enforcement agencies worldwide), provides extensive training programs, and publishes the annual Uniform Crime Reports. Apart from its own academy at Quantico, VA, the FBI also runs a similar training program at the International Law Enforcement Academy in Budapest, which trains police forces in "emerging democracies." The FBI is also responsible for background checks on nominees for "sensitive" government posts, including Presidential appointees and federal court judges. Somewhat less officially, since the days of J. Edgar Hoover the FBI has had a reputation for serving as the direct covert investigation agency of the President, with several reputed shady activities only justified by executive order and with minimal openness.

The FBI works in concert with the United States Attorneys, providing them with information about crimes that they can choose to prosecute. Title 28, Section 533 of the United States Code places the FBI firmly under the Executive Branch umbrella: officials in the Bureau are appointed to work on behalf of the Attorney General to "detect crimes against the United States." The Directorship of the FBI is a Presidential appointment, with "the advice and consent of the Senate," serving a ten-year term.

The Director is assisted in his duties by a Deputy Director. Below them are thirteen Assistant Directors; eleven of those are responsible for a Division and assisted by a Deputy Assistant Director of their own. There are also Assistant Directors in the Office of Public & Congressional Affairs, in charge of reporting on what the FBI actually accomplishes, and the Office of Public Responsibility, which handles civilian complaints. There are two other special posts equivalent to an Assistant Director in authority: the General Counsel for the Bureau, and the Equal Employment Officer (who makes sure federal hiring standards are met).

The eleven Divisions of the Bureau have confusing titles, and it is frequently difficult to pierce the bureaucracy and determine which division handles what (complicated by the similarity between many of their names), but here is a listing: Administrative Services, Counterterrorism, Criminal Investigations, Criminal Justice Information Services, Finance, Information Resources, Inspection, Investigative Services, Laboratory, National Security, and Training. Greater detail is provided on several of these below.

The FBI has over 11,000 active Special Agents (in keeping with the original terminology used by Bonaparte), and 16,000 assorted support employees. This massive force maintains 56 field offices (including one in Puerto Rico), in various metropolitan areas of the US. Each is run by a Special-Agent-In-Charge (SAC), except for the offices in Washington DC, New York City, and Los Angeles. These largest three offices are headed by an Assistant-Director-In-Charge, due to the large numbers of agents and support staff they must manage. Each SAC has an Assistant SAC. Each Field Office is responsible for several smaller Resident Agencies, which are satellite offices in less populated areas and are run by Supervisory Senior Resident Agents (SSRAs.) Finally, there are four Information Technical Centers, where the computer databases are maintained, in different areas of the country (Pocatello, ID; Fort Monmouth, NJ; Butte, MT; and Savannah, GA).

The FBI has also expanded its presence overseas in the last two decades. The International Operations Branch of the Criminal Investigation Division coordinates all overseas activities, which require the permission of the host country and coordination with the State Department, generally through one of the 38 Legal Attache offices scattered around the world. This branch also coordinates the FBI's relationship with Interpol and with foreign law enforcement agencies that have permission to operate within the United States.

Some of the other divisions require further details. The Criminal Justice Information Service (CJIS) Division maintains the National Crime Information Center (NCIC) database, which includes the national fingerprint database, as well as databases on missing persons, state arrest records, etc., and is generally available to assist any local authority. This is a tremendous resource for any hacker/researcher PC, official or otherwise. Another subdivision with a lot of gaming potential is the Critical Incident Response Group (CIRG), formed in 1994 as a multi-divisional task force for emergency response to major terrorist activities such as bombings, hijackings, etc., as well as hostage and barricade scenarios. The Hostage Rescue Team (HRT) has been combined into the CIRG recently. A third subdivision that can be an interesting addition to a modern-day scenario is the Disaster Squad, a subdivision of the FBI Labs Division that specializes in the rapid identification of the deceased at disaster sites.

The Special Agent

A Special Agent of the FBI begins his or her career at the FBI Academy in Quantico, VA. In order to qualify as a Special Agent, applicants must have a ST and HT of at least 11, and an IQ and DX of at least 10. Eyesight and hearing must be at least average, and the applicant must have no physical disadvantages that would interfere with meeting the physical training standards. Candidates also have to pass several interviews and a full background check, so many of the most severe mental disadvantages are also disqualifying. They must be between the ages of 23 and 37, and have a four-year degree at an accredited institution. Agents who have degrees in accounting or law or speak a foreign language of particular use to the Bureau (for example, Spanish, Russian, or Arabic) will be preferred.

The Academy itself sits on 385 acres of lovely woodlands, and includes several dorms, a dining hall, library, chapel, auditorium, and a world-class forensics lab. There are several gymnasias, over a dozen shooting ranges, a driving track for training, and an entire fake "town" of building facades called "Hogans Alley" for training in urban tactics and surveillance. The Agent training program is sixteen intensive weeks, in which the trainee takes classroom courses alternated with physical training. A graduate of the Academy should have the skills listed below:

- At least one of Law (Federal Crime)-14, Accounting (Forensic)-14 or fluency in at least two useful languages besides English. If Law (Federal Crime) is not used for this qualification, the agent must still spend at least 2 points on that skill.
- At least 4 points in: Criminology, Gun (Pistol)
- At least 2 points in: Driving (auto), Forensics, Judo, Karate, Shadowing
- At least 1 point in: Computer Operation/TL 7, First Aid/TL 7, Gun (rifle), Handcuff*, Holdout, Interrogation Leadership, Psychology, Research, Stealth, Tactics
- At least 1/2 point in: Administration, Diplomacy, Fast-Draw (pistol), Gun (Light Automatic), Running, Writing

* Handcuff is a new P/A skill, defaulting to DX-3, the successful use of which allows the user to apply ordinary handcuffs to a docile or surprised subject (or a resisting subject who is pinned, as B112) in a single action. Without this skill, applying handcuffs takes 2d6 seconds. Handcuffs cannot be applied to a subject who is resisting without pinning or otherwise immobilizing him.

At the end of the training period, the agent begins a two-year probationary period. They will be assigned to a field office (the Bureau will consider any requests for postings, but retains final decision based on its own needs) and given a "mentor," usually a Special Agent with at least five years experience, to oversee the continuing training in the field. Special Agent status gives the agent the Legal Enforcement Powers advantage at the 10-point level, plus Administrative Rank (FBI) at the 5-point level. Also, the FBI itself becomes a patron, Very Powerful, Quite Often. A Duty (Almost All the Time) is added, making the entire basic package (without including required skills) worth 50 points.

Keep in mind that this package is for Special Agents, and it's entirely possible to have FBI employment in a character's background without any of these requirements, if they've been employed in some other capacity. The FBI employs over 16,000 support staffers in various areas like lab technicians, programmers, fingerprint specialists, translators, lawyers, chemists, etc. All that is required for these positions is a physical (ST & HT of at least 9), passing a low-level background check, and possession of relevant professional skills. Many support staffers have at least a basic self-defense course (say, at least 1/2 point in Judo) and firearms training, but even this is not a requirement for most positions.

The Administrative Ranks for the FBI are as follows:

- *Rank 7:* Director
- *Rank 6:* Deputy Director
- *Rank 5:* AD or other Divisional Head
- *Rank 4:* Deputy AD or ADIC
- *Rank 3:* SAC

Rank 2: SSRA or Asst. SAC

- *Rank 1:* Special Agent
- *Rank 0:* Support Staff

Please note that at any given time Ranks 6 and 7 are unique positions. As suggested on p. B22, no PC should begin with an FBI rank above 3.

Agents carry credentials, handcuffs and sidearms (typically .38s or .45s of various makers- the FBI uses a wide range of firearms). Special Agents are expected to maintain a fairly strict dress code.

References and Further Reading

- www.fbi.gov - The official site of the Bureau, with history and a massive collection of other relevant links. Look here first, but remember this is the official site and nothing critical of the FBI will be found.
- www.trac.syr.edu - Home of the TRAC pages, independently studying the effectiveness of several government agencies.
- www.britannica.com - One of the best general research sites on the web. Marvelous magazine article archives, only a little out-of-date.



by **Stephen Kenson**

"[Wonder Woman's invisible plane] is just the sort of lovely and pointless idea we should encourage."
-- from Alan Moore's proposal for the *Glory* comic book series

The world of the *Aberrant* RPG from White Wolf Games Studio is a near-future transformed by the presence of people with super-powers, known as "novas." *Aberrant* takes many of the cliches and conventions of the comic book genre and examines them in a new light. After all, if you really had super-powers would you put on a colorful costume and start robbing banks, or would you sign a lucrative licensing deal with Nike or Disney that could earn you millions? Not all of the "heroes" in *Aberrant* are motivated by pure altruism, nor do the "villains" operate purely in the name of badness. The setting has a more post-modern look and feel compared to its comic book predecessors.

However, that additional level of realism sometimes means *Aberrant* sacrifices some of the "lovely and pointless" elements of the comics (as comic book writer Alan Moore once called them); things like fantastic lost cities, aliens, weird science, giant monsters, magic (with all its alliterative spells and entities), parallel universes, and so forth. Fortunately, the *Aberrant* setting is more than capable of explaining a lot of weird stuff, it's just a matter of how high on the weird-O-meter scale you want your own *Aberrant* game to get.

The mechanism *Aberrant* provides for explaining the comic book superpowers of novas is the ability to mentally control quantum forces, believed to be the fundamental forces that make up physical reality. Some of the wilder ideas of quantum rubber science offer plenty of opportunities to add strange elements to this game world.

Super-Science!

"Of course! Reed Richards! The most gifted inventive genius of our time!"
-- *Fantastic Four #15*

A staple of the comics that *Aberrant* tends to downplay is the wondrous variety of super-scientific gizmos heroes and villains seem to whip up at the drop of a hat. The prime reason for this is novas can actually use their scientific discoveries and inventions for the betterment of humanity (or at least to earn big royalty checks), rather than just using them to commit or solve crimes. Nobody invents a time travel device and then just keeps it in their Bavarian castle. Therefore the game tries to limit the proliferation of advanced technology to keep the world looking like something vaguely resembling our own. If you're not concerned with such consequences, then you can loosen the restrictions placed on Mega-Intelligent novas who want to invent teleportation devices and other such world-altering machines. Just be aware that such technology will transform the setting in a fairly short amount of time.

Another way to allow super-technology into the game that doesn't impact too greatly on the setting is to draw a distinction between novas inventing new, viable technologies that anyone can use and nova-made "gizmos" that are really just manifestations of the nova's inherent quantum ability to bend reality. For example, the nova invents a particular device, but only he (or another nova) can make it work as it's supposed to. In anyone else's hands, it's just a useless piece of junk and, if anyone takes it apart, not only can they not figure out how it works but it will appear that it shouldn't work at all.

The City in a Bottle

"I have to check the city-in-the-bottle regularly to see that the tiny people inside it are safe!"

-- Superman, *Superman* #134

Characters in the comic books often have access to fantastic places like the bottle-city of Kandor in Superman's Fortress of Solitude, Wonder Woman's home Paradise Island, and the Microverse visited on occasion by the Fantastic Four and other Marvel heroes. While it's not likely someone in *Aberrant* has a city under glass sitting on a desk somewhere (although you never know), there are still plenty of possibilities for "bottle cities" that fit into the setting.

One possibility is the existence of a "virtual city" (or even a "virtual world") that exists solely inside a computer. Computers in *Aberrant* are becoming more and more advanced due to the genius of nova engineers and programmers, and some novas can interface with computers directly via the cyberkinesis power. Perhaps a simulation or computer model of a real-world city takes on a life of its own. By putting on VR suits (or using cyberkinesis), characters can "enter" this virtual world and interact with its inhabitants. This allows for adventures like the movie *The Matrix*, or lighter fare like *Tron*. The virtual world can be just about any kind of setting and the characters may or may not have access to their nova powers there, allowing for change-of-pace adventures.

The unleashed quantum forces in *Aberrant* may lead to other sorts of "bottle cities." Perhaps a "fold" in spacetime traps a city or town outside of the rest of the world, surrounded by an impenetrable "fence" only novas (with their quantum manipulating abilities) can pass through. What happens to the people inside the "quantum barrier," cut off from the outside world, possibly forever? They might revert to a more pastoral existence, with no television, radio, or other outside resources. Or they might be forced to become more independent and self-sufficient, depending on the size of their bio-sphere.

The spacetime fold might also cause time to pass more quickly for the people trapped inside it. Imagine: a town vanishes off the face of the Earth. Novas sent to investigate discover a spacetime distortion invisible to everyone else. Inside they find the lost town, only centuries have passed for the people there rather than hours or days. When the novas return, they discover they've only been gone a matter of seconds rather than weeks or months. How might such a pocket of "fast time" evolve? What happens when the evolved (or de-evolved) society within finds a way back to Earth?

A literal "city in a bottle" is difficult to explain even with the quantum rubber-science of *Aberrant*, but it could be that such a "shrunk city" might be inside a spacetime distortion similar to the one mentioned above. The city only looks miniaturized from the outside; pass through the distortion and you find yourself in the full-sized city. Perhaps the world outside looks enormous, or perhaps it's not even visible.

Lost Worlds

"It's the strangest feeling I've ever known! I'm actually flying in a world that should have died out a million years ago!"

-- The Angel, *X-Men* #10

Comic book settings often feature various "Lost Worlds," places where dinosaurs still roam and savage tribes of people struggle to survive. They often have elements of different ancient civilizations (lost worlds where the successors of the Roman Empire still live are quite popular). Marvel Comics' Savage Land is one such example, as are Skartaris and the Wild Lands from the DC Comics *Warlord* and *Superboy*, respectively.

There are several ways to introduce Lost Worlds into the *Aberrant* setting. The first is the *Jurassic Park* approach; some Mega-Intelligent nova scientist figures out how to clone dinosaurs from DNA samples (or genetically engineer convincing fake dinosaurs). The thunder-lizards are grown on an isolated tropical island, intended as test subjects for scientific study, the attractions for a new theme park, or both. Naturally, things don't always go smoothly, and novas have to deal with a rampaging T. Rex or two.

Perhaps a nova with temporal manipulation abilities comes up with a way to "fish" into the past, hooking dinosaurs

(and other creatures) and "pulling" them into the present. Putting aside the possibility of temporal paradoxes and the like arising from this approach, its a good way to bring real dinosaurs into the present. You can always have the science-types speculate the the dinos come from an alternate past or "shadow time" that doesn't impact the present in any way, keeping history intact. (On the other hand, a more fragile temporal continuum may lead to lots of other problems for novas who start tampering with it.)

If "pulling" things into the present from the past doesn't affect our history, then the idea might get extended to creating "living laboratories" for observing human and proto-human civilizations abducted from the past, isolated "habitats" where real ancient Romans or Egyptians still live. Maybe alien and "faerie" abductions in the past are the result of nova time-travelers looking for "specimines" for the future. And what if there are people in the future doing the same thing in our present?

Finally, novas might run into a natural quantum phenomenon like a "pocket universe" where dinosaurs still thrive (perhaps alongside primitive humans, unlike our own history). Is the "pocket" a fluke of quantum forces or a portal into the past (our own or that of a parallel universe)? With their quantum-manipulating abilities, the most powerful novas may even be able to create their own pocket universes, populated however they want! In addition to being amusing playgrounds, they may offer all kinds of scientific insights.

They Came From Outer Space!

"They were merciless! They were inhuman! Greater than Earthmen! They were the deadly Skrulls from Outer Space!"
-- *Fantastic Four #2*

People in *Aberrant* have explored the solar system a bit farther than anything we've done; being able to teleport out to the orbit of Jupiter to collect samples and take pictures without having to wear a space suit has its advantages. Still, space is vast, and humans in *Aberrant* haven't gone beyond the confines of the solar system, or encountered any other life out there. This is quite different from the comic books, where dozens of alien races visit Earth on a regular basis, although the general populous rarely, if ever, finds out anything about them and most are considered nothing but hoaxes. Definite proof of alien life would certainly change how humanity looks at the universe.

Fortunately, *Aberrant* is set in the same universe as White Wolf's *Trinity* RPG, which takes place over a hundred years after *Aberrant*, when humanity is exploring the universe and has encountered some aliens. If you want to stay true to the *Aberrant/Trinity* timeline, then any human contact with the aliens from *Trinity* that takes place in the 21st century will have to be covert. If you're not worried about altering the *Trinity* future timeline, then you can feel free to plunder *Trinity* for ideas about alien encounters, and have the Qin show up a century or so early to pay us a visit.

Plenty of popular science fiction deals with first contact with an alien race in the present or near future. Unlike the comics, first contact is likely to be a momentous event in *Aberrant*, unless something happens to ensure things remain covert, in which case you can run *X-Files* type adventures as the Powers That Be in the *Aberrant* world (like Project Utopia and the Directive) work to cover up the existence of alien beings while the player characters encounter increasing evidence of their presence.

Aberrant is also well suited for the appearance of truly alien lifeforms, along the lines of David Gerrold's *War Against the Chtorr* series or the Swarm invasion in the *Wild Cards* anthology series of books (both detailed in *GURPS* sourcebooks). An alien infestation might not be smart enough to know that Earth has novas to defend it, or might be operating based on outdated information from before the eruption of the first novas, and therefore not expecting any heavy resistance. While Chtorrians are more than a match for most humans, novas should be able to plow through them. But there are likely to be a lot of alien creepy crawlies, and there are only so many novas.

If an intelligent alien race makes contact, they might still be hostile (leading to a nova-powered version of *Independence Day*) or they might be peaceful, although still mysterious regarding their intentions (like the enigmatic Qin from *Trinity*), leading to plotlines like those on the *Earth: Final Conflict* television show.

There's also the possibility of aliens having visited Earth in the past that aren't around any longer. Warren Ellis' story

"The Outer Dark" in *The Authority* comic book postulates that Earth was actually terraformed by an alien in the distant past, inadvertently leading to the creation of life. Now, millions of years later, the alien returns to find its "summer home" infested with six billion of these little parasites that call themselves "humans." H.P. Lovecraft's *Cthulhu Mythos* stories are about the existence of very alien creatures visiting Earth from space and possibly other dimensions. Imagine sending a group of novas up against a mixed-up cult they think is led by a renegade nova, only they discover this nova can summon strange things, some of which seem to have minds of their own. Quantum Constructs, aliens, or demons? Is there really a difference?

The Mystic Arts

"The mystic arts of black magic are older than the memory of man! In time to come, let us peer behind the enchanted veil together!"

-- Dr. Strange, *Strange Tales*

There's no magic in the **Aberrant** world . . . or is there? Novas all gain their amazing powers from the ability to mentally manipulate quantum forces. Still, who's to say that isn't the same thing as magic? After all, the **Aberrant Player's Guide** states that small numbers of novas have existed before the mass-eruptions in 1998. The powers of these novas may have led to the creation of myths and theories about magic throughout history. Also, a number of modern occultists and scientists speculate that quantum models of the universe may account for "magical" or "psychic" abilities possessed by humans. If the nova potential is latent in everyone, then perhaps the mystic arts aren't all that far from the powers of novas.

Nova powers also tend to manifest within the framework of the individual nova's experiences and beliefs. So a nova particularly dedicated to studying the occult might manifest quantum powers based around how he or she things magic works. The powers might be dependent on particular magical rituals or trappings like symbols and talismans. The Satanist novas in the **Reignofevil.com** book use this motif. The characters Fortunato and the Astronomer from the *Wild Cards* books were aces (novas) with similar limitations. And when a mystically-minded nova with the Quantum Construct power uses it to summon a horde of demons, who's to say they're not real? Maybe demons have always been "quantum constructs" or perhaps what novas like to clothe in the comfortable terms of "quantum power" is really something else altogether.

Of course, there's always the possibility that the abilities of novas only scratch the surface of the "true" nature of reality. Storytellers looking for a real weird combo may want to import some of the cosmology and systems from White Wolf's Mage: the Ascension RPG, where people with the ability to reshape reality are fighting a secret war for control over it. The existence of novas definitely changes elements of the Mage setting, but the two systems could coexist with a little work. (*Editor's note: check out [To Tear The Scales From Their Eyes](#) for a view of such a world.*)

Parallel Dimensions

"I am from the other side of the mirror . . . I was born in an antimatter reflection of your universe. Where I live, good is evil and vice versa."

-- Alexander Luthor, *JLA: Earth 2*

One opportunity quantum theory and the quantum powers of novas opens up is the existence of parallel universes, perhaps an infinite continuum of worlds where events happened differently from how they happened in **Aberrant's** timeline. Fred Alan Wolf's book *Parallel Universes: The Search for Other Worlds* provides all sorts of information on the science behind the theory of parallel universes, how they might exist, and how we might be able to reach them. It's certainly possible novas might have the ability to travel into parallel universes, or bring things from parallels into their universe (the "dino-napping" in *Lost Worlds*, above, is one example of this).

Parallel universes provide a great mechanism for stroytelling simply because they're places where novas can "let loose" without seriously impacting the setting of the regular series. If a nova causes California to slide into the ocean on a parallel Earth, it doesn't affect the nova's home-world (although it should certainly affect the nova). Parallels offer the

opportunity to show what might have been, or what might be, if the characters were to take a different path. The Storyteller can also use encounters with parallel versions of the player characters to point up particular things about their background or personality, like holding up a distorted mirror that exaggerates certain things.

Of course, there's also the possibility of a parallel universe making contact first, either sending peaceful explorers or an invasion fleet. Even peaceful contact with the best of intentions may go awry if the visitors make mistakes about our culture, technology, or the like (or if they simply underestimate human greed and paranoia). Hostile contact may be the start of an interdimensional war (or just a skirmish, depending on how difficult it is to travel between worlds). What do the novas do when a refugee from a parallel world that's going through its own version of the Aberrant War (described in *Trinity*) shows up on their world begging for their help? Do they go to another world to stop Taint-crazed versions of themselves and the people they know from destroying it? What does that tell them about the future of their own world? If they intervene once, where do they stop? Once the floodgate of parallel worlds is opened, there may be no going back.

Fabled Realms

"Asgard! Fabled realm of the Norse gods!"

-- "Tales of Asgard" from *Journey into Mystery*

More than a few novas fall prey to what is known as "India Syndrome." With their god-like powers, these novas actually come to believe they are gods or, at the very least, divinely empowered. The Syndrome is named for the fact that so many of the novas that erupt in the Indian sub-continent believe they are avatars of the Hindu gods, with their powers and appearance matching accordingly. These novas are often worshipped by baseline followers, petitioned to use their "holy" powers to aid and protect their people. And what is a pantheon without some infighting between divinities from time to time?

As with magic, who's to say whether or not nova "gods" are the genuine article? Perhaps some of the mythological gods actually were novas, real people with superhuman powers that became the basis of the myths and legends. Perhaps those novas were "channeling" the same archetypes from the Universal Unconscious, the Morphic Field, or some similar source, in which case the modern "gods" are just as real as their predecessors, if not more so. Even if these novas aren't really gods, they're worshipped and believed in; do the characters have the right to destroy the faith of the people who believe in them?

Mythology provides a rich source of ideas for nova characters and plotlines. Perhaps modern-day nova deities are re-enacting some of their ancient myths. Old rivalries between gods and pantheons flare up and a "war of the gods" becomes a distinct possibility, with the player characters caught in the middle. Self-proclaimed "angels" war against "devils" (nova and otherwise). Competing nova "deities" create conflicts of faith among their human worshippers, while others proclaim new cults and religions, like the Church of the Immanent Escheaton or Kamisama Buddhism. What's more imposing, facing off against a Taint-ridden aberrant freak or the living incarnation of Kali, the Hindu goddess of destruction?

And what of the fabulous realms of the gods, the heavens, hells, and various afterlives? It's quite possible, given the existence of parallel universes (above) that these places all exist somewhere "out there." Are they real places that some special people (novas?) have had contact with in the past, were they created by powerful nova "gods" in the past, or did they arise somehow out of an interaction between the Universal Unconscious and the quantum structure of reality? Or are newly erupted nova "deities" actually creating entire new universes at the moment of their eruption to fit into their concept of their place in the cosmos? There's really no way of knowing for sure, but it's possible that some novas have the ability to travel to these worlds, allowing Storytellers to re-enact the battles of Ragnarok or other mythological events with the novas as the stars of the show. Characters can pay visits to "heaven" or "hell" and have their preconceptions of the universe shaken by those experiences. And there's always the possibility that something from one of those realms might come to pay us a visit.

Recommended Reading

There are many sources of ideas for adding strange new elements to an *Aberrant* game. One of the best is the comics themselves, although most of the ideas in the four-color comics need to be looked at through the modern "lens" of the *Aberrant* setting to give them just the right twist to make them fit, like the things described in this article. Some other useful sources of inspiration are given below.

- Carroll, Peter. *Liber Kaos*. Samuel Weiser, Inc. Although this is mainly a book on post-modern occultism (known as "chaos magic") it does have some interesting ideas about the nature of space-time and the universe and how they make magic possible. Applicable to the quantum powers and abilities in *Aberrant*, especially if you want to tie them to magic.
- Crosley, Reginald. *The Vodou Quantum Leap*. Llewellyn Publications. Vodou and quantum theory combine to make a surprisingly coherent look at how the universe may work, with some ideas applicable to novas, particularly those of a mystical bent.
- Ellis, Warren. *The Authority*. Wildstorm (DC Comics). A comic book series about a group of superhumans who could easily be novas, set in a world full of "lovely and pointless" things and general weirdness. If you like *Aberrant* you owe it to yourself to pick up this book. Ellis wrote the first twelve issues, but it's now being ably written by Mark Millar. Ellis' earlier work on *StormWatch* is also worth looking at (and has been conveniently collected into four graphic novels).
- Gruenwald, Mark. *Squadron Supreme*. Marvel Comics. A graphic novel (originally a 12-issue comic series) about a super-team that takes responsibility for fixing all the world's ills and falls into some ethical dilemmas along the way. A little more "comic book" than *Aberrant*, but with a lot of ideas applicable to it.
- Hite, Ken. *Suppressed Transmission*. Steve Jackson Games. Ken Hite's Suppressed Transmission column in Pyramid is a weekly dose of weirdness usable in all sorts of ways. For the conspiracy buffs there's lots of opportunities to weave in threads of plots going back to the dawn of time, while those looking for elements of the fantastic will often find them here. Not always applicable to *Aberrant*, but always a good read. Some of the columns have been collected into two books, also from Steve Jackson Games, and complete with annotations and footnotes.
- Moore, Alan. Nearly anything by this brilliant British comic book writer is worth looking at. He coined the phrase that gives this article its title and has a great insight into the nature of comic book stories. Of particular interest is his *Watchmen* series (considered a classic), along with *Promethea*, which gets into the nature of stories and archetypes, and comics like *Supreme*, *Tom Strong*, and *Top Ten*.
- Morrison, Grant. *JLA*. DC Comics. Grant Morrison's modern interpretation of the Justice League of America manages to sneak in all kinds of modern science weirdness about superspace, the fifth dimension, time travel, nanotechnology, and quantum theory in between the colorful costumes and heroic action.
- Talbot, Michael. *The Holographic Universe*. HarperCollins. Quantum theory and holographic reality for the average reader. Provides lots of information about new scientific theories about the nature of reality and how they may be tied to paranormal abilities. Full of ideas usable with *Aberrant*.
- Waid, Mark & Ross, Alex. *Kingdom Come*. DC Comics. A comic series (also collected into a graphic novel) about a future DC Universe where everything's going to hell. Some good ideas of what the *Aberrant* setting might look like not long before the Aberrant War happens.
- Wolf, Fred Alan. *Parallel Universes: The Search for Other Worlds*. Touchstone (Simon & Schuster). How modern scientific theories speculate about the existence of parallel universes, what they might be like, and how we might be able to visit them. Full of ideas about the quantum science that forms the background of *Aberrant*. His *Taking the Quantum Leap* is also worthwhile.



by Dmitri Scull

Designing races that behave in a completely unpredictable manner isn't too easy with *GURPS*; the basic rules assume that the character is a rational, thinking being . . . which isn't necessarily the case in a fantasy scenario. Races such as the fae, or creatures born from chaos, will not behave according to what is acceptable in polite society, they may not even be recognizable as intelligent.

Remember that these Disadvantages are disruptive before taking them; the Game Master may wish to limit them to NPC characters, unless the party is ready to deal with an individual who is clearly insane. This may not be a problem in a game based around the Faerie Folk, or that regularly deals with primal chaos, or any good comedy game, but serious games may have a problem with insane player characters.

On the other hand, if treated in a serious fashion, any of these Disadvantages can make for a truly dark and scary villain, especially one with spells or psionics that can induce madness in others . . .

Irrational

-30 points

The character is wildly unpredictable, and draws unsupported conclusions and acts in a bizarre and uncontrolled manner. The character is clearly insane by most standards. This Disadvantage requires roleplaying. Aside from that, the character must make a Will roll at -4 to behave in an orderly manner or not act on a whim. Most people react to irrational individuals at -4 or worse, fearing them to be dangerous. No character can have the Irrational Disadvantage and the Wild Disadvantage. A character can be both Irrational and Impulsive, but will act on just about any whim, no matter how self-destructive or dangerous.

Whimsy

-10 points

Whimsical characters cannot take anything really seriously. They constantly make jokes, laugh at inopportune times, and are unlikely to react in what most would consider a useful manner. A character with the Whimsy Disadvantage can make a Will roll to remain serious, if the situation warrants. If the character is actually funny, this may give a reaction bonus at times. If the character isn't funny, this is usually worth a -1 penalty. In situations requiring tact and a serious demeanor, this is worth at least a -1 to reactions. Characters with the No Sense of Humor Disadvantage react to characters with Whimsy at -2 (and vice versa).

Wild

-15 points

The character tends to act on his or her whims, often behaving in an unpredictable manner. This is a lesser form of the Irrational Disadvantage. A character with this disadvantage who wishes to resist an impulse must make a Will roll. Note that this differs from Impulsive in that the actions of impulsive characters still tend to make sense; a character with this Disadvantage tends to act on any impulse. No character can take this Disadvantage and the Irrational

Disadvantage. Characters who are both Impulsive and Wild tend to act on any and all impulses. Most people react to Wild characters at -2.

Bohnanza

Published by [Rio Grande Games](#)



Designed by Uwe Rosenberg

154 bean cards, 7 3rd bean field cards, rulebook; \$14.95

Players sitting through their first session of Rio Grande Games' German import, *Bohnanza*, may have trouble deciding which is funnier, the idea that they are all a bunch of bean farmers, or the hilarious illustrations of their crops. *Bohnanza* is a card game of resource management and wily trading. Once all of the laughter subsides, and that may be a while, players will find a clever game that continues the tradition of substantial German imports.

Two to seven farmers manage two bean fields, attempting to plant beans and harvest them at just the right time to get the best price while making room for incoming crops. After the farmers have gone through the deck three times, the player with the most gold coins wins.

The rules of the game are clear and easy to follow. The rulebook is colorfully illustrated and the margins contain text that repeats the most important rules for easy reference. The final page contains variations on the game based on the number of players. By removing some of the cards, players can adjust the game for two to seven players, although the two player version requires significant rule changes.

The cards are high quality playing cards with simply fantastic illustrations. The black-eyed bean is a dazed boxer with a shiner, the soy bean is dressed like a hippie, and the red bean is very embarrassed because he is nude. There are eleven types of beans in all.

Players begin the game with a hand of five bean cards. The order of cards in a hand is very important, so players must never rearrange their beans. During a turn, a player starts by planting the first bean card in her hand, and optionally the second. An empty bean field can contain any kind of bean. A bean field with one or more beans already planted can only have more beans of the same kind. If both of a player's bean fields contain beans, and she must plant, then she will have to harvest one of her fields. (A farmer can alleviate her pain somewhat by purchasing a third field for three gold coins.)

At any time during the game, players may harvest their beans. At the bottom of every bean card is a "beanometer." The beanometer shows a set of numbers and a stack of gold coins for each number. This tells the player how many gold coins he or she will receive for selling that number of beans. For example, if a farmer sells four wax beans, he gets one gold coin. If he sells seven he gets two coins. He gets three coins for nine beans and four coins for eleven beans. The rarer beans have a better return on their beanometers. Of the eleven types of beans, the cocoa bean shows up the least (only four in the entire deck), and it has the best return on its beanometer. The plentiful wax bean, at 22 for the deck, requires many more cards to turn a profit. The frequency of each bean in the deck appears on the bean cards as a yellow number.

The back of each card has an illustration of a gold coin, so players merely flip the necessary number of cards to keep as their score and discard the rest. This has the effect of lowering the number of that particular bean in the deck, so players have to pay attention if a particular type of bean is becoming scarcer.

After planting the first card in her hand, the active player then draws two cards and places them face up in front of her fields. She will have to plant these two new beans. If they match the beans already in her fields, then she can plant

them for a bigger harvest. If they do not match, she will want to trade them away.

Players can trade beans from anywhere in their hands for the two new cards. They can also trade for cards from the active player's hand. Players can donate a bean card to another player if they are desperate to get rid of a card. The receiving player, however, can turn down the donation. All players are out to fine tune their hands so they can plant wisely on their turns. After trading, players must plant all of the beans they received in trade or donation. Ideally, the active player will be able to plant more of the same type of beans and will have traded away any other beans. Finally, the active player adds three new cards to the bottom of her hand and the next player takes a turn. Players shuffle the discards when the deck is depleted to form a new deck. When the deck is exhausted for the third time, players add up their coins to determine a winner.

The challenge of ***Bohnanza*** comes from being forced to plant too soon. Players are constantly faced with this problem. Just as they finally have two fields with plenty of beans, along comes a stink bean to force them to harvest a field before they got the maximum number of coins from the beanometer. Often, players will have to harvest without getting even a single coin. The only remedy for this is smart trading tactics. Through trading, players can get rid of useless cards from their hands and can avoid being forced to harvest early. Unfortunately, every card traded or donated usually helps an opponent.

Players must also keep an eye out for bean market surpluses. If two players are already planting chili beans, a third player will have difficulty trading for these beans. A crafty trader will try to play these chili farmers against one another to get the best beans for her chili cards.

Like so many games coming from Germany in the last decade, ***Bohnanza*** provides a great deal of fun with attractive, high quality components. Games last about 45 minutes and anyone age 12 years old and up can handle the rules.

-- *Brad Weier*

Pyramid Review

A Lion in the Ropes (for d20)

Written by Stephen Chenault

Published by [Troll Lord Games](#)



24 b&w pages; \$6.00

A Lion in the Ropes is a *d20* adventure designed for 4-8 characters levels 2-4. The adventure is set in Troll Lord Games' *World of Erde* in the *After Winter* Dark Fantasy Campaign Setting. The author doesn't waste precious space explaining how to either scale the adventure or place it in a different setting, trusting that a capable DM can either do so herself or find the relevant information in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*.

The adventure is short but well thought-out and very different from other *d20* offerings to date. The book opens with a brief narrative to establish the setting then goes on to give an outline of the adventure as a whole as well as relevant history of the region and how it pertains to the events of the story. The background is informative without being gratuitous and while the players will likely never discover most of the details, knowing the underside of the iceberg is essential for adding dept to the adventure. Also included is a brief (four paragraph) section titled "Advice from a Tired Referee." As the name implies, this is a somewhat apologetic attempt at advising the DM, concerned mainly with how to maintain mystery, build suspense, and handle an encounter-based adventure with numerous red herrings.

Troll Lord's original material, including NPCs, new monsters and new spells, is separated in gray boxed text, while flavor text intended to be read to the players is printed in bold type. There is actually an inordinate amount of such flavor text in the adventure, including quite a bit of NPC dialogue. This is a far cry from the usual *D&D* style of a short paragraph of read-aloud description followed by several (sometimes tedious) paragraphs of DM information. Moreover, the dialogue is reasonably well-written, more akin to a good novel than the usual role-playing fare.

Jason Walton's cover painting is excellent, conveying an amusing sense of menace while taking little risk of spoiling the adventure. The interior art is not quite as impressive but is not bad by any means. It is also relevant to the adventure. Maps are included on the interior covers of the book. While they get the job done, they are dull by comparison to those in Wizards of the Coast's products. Unfortunately, *A Lion in the Ropes* uses two full pages on the *d20* and Open Game Licenses, using the same font for them as the main text. For a twenty-four-page book these are wasted pages indeed.

A Lion in the Ropes is a good, solid adventure that should make for a fun evening of play. It is rather short at (effectively) twenty-two pages but even so it is well worth the \$6.00 cover price.

(SPOILER ALERT: Potential players should read no further.)

The adventure does a nice job of setting up red herrings to deter the players from easily identifying the villain in the story. The most misleading fact is the sighting in the area of a large, cat-like creature with a mane of serpents that local folklorists identify as a dreaded Charon Fiend, a close cousin of the chimera. In reality the "Charon Fiend" is nothing more than a tame lion recently escaped from a traveling carnival. The restraining board and frayed ropes still clasped to his head have given him the appearance of a mane of snakes, which has led to his misidentification. This is a clever ruse on the author's part and a well-drawn illustration of the hapless beast makes it clear how such a mistake could be

made. However, the title of the adventure and especially the reprinting of said illustration on the back cover give away entirely too much of the secret. Moreover, half a page of text is given to the stats of the Charon Fiend even though the beast never actually appears in the adventure.

The resolution of the ultimate conflict is equally paradoxical. The true culprits in the story make for some tough monsters to fight, but the adventure provides a potentially elegant resolution to the conflict. However, on the chance that the PCs don't think of this solution, there are several more, powerful monsters inexplicably waiting inside a sealed tomb for the characters to fight. This seemed like a cop-out from what might otherwise have been a refreshing way to end the adventure.

Even so, conscientious Dungeon Masters should have no difficulty utilizing this adventure to its best potential.

-- *Neal Byles*

Pyramid Review

Siege on Tolkeen: Chapter Five, Shadows of Evil

Published by [Palladium Books](#)

Written by Kevin Siembieda



112 b & w pages; \$12.95

The fifth installment of the *Siege on Tolkeen* takes a step back. Instead of more monsters, magic items, and techno-wizardry devices, the book surveys the land and the damages done to both sides so far.

There are no chapters in the book, but thanks to the contents page, and the quick find page, things can be found fairly quickly. Starting off with a brief update on the Tolkeen forces and their triumph from book three, the *Sorcerer's Revenge*, the reader discovers that many of the Tolkeen volunteer forces have slowly started to disband. The two main reasons are that they think the war is over, and they are tired of the evils committed by Tolkeen in its defense.

The majority of the book has locations, NPCs, and tables to add into the *Siege On Tolkeen* campaign. This ranges from wastelands such as The Barrens, earthly fortresses crafted by Earth Warlocks, to Skelebot Graveyards where scavengers, active Skelebots, and other terror wait. The most detailed area, Mad Town, is mapped and has over fifty locations for characters to explore. One of the more interesting groups of bandits or freebooters is the White Knights. Organized by Lady White, a fallen Cyber Knight, this group has some morals and honor, but serves the Tolkeen forces out of hatred for the Coalition.

The most useful parts are the updated maps that show where all these things fit into the regions. Both Tolkeen and Coalition forces have P.O.W. camps, but the Coalition ones are death camps. The master map on page 48 shows where all the new areas introduced in this book, Mizereen Barony, Rivereen Barony, Wildwoods Barony, and others, fit in with the Tokeen Barony, the Hives, where the new Barrens, and CAMPS are. The ending, an epilogue, has a nasty surprise for the Tolkeen forces which should lead up to *Chapter Six: Final Siege*.

The art continues to be a strong seller for the *Rifts* line. Kent Burles does some fantastic landscapes for the Barrens, lending the scored earth a personality that few artists could capture. His full page spread on page 6 shows a tower of stone fighting off Coalition forces. Other illustrations by Burles of the Barrens help bring this location to life and give GMs a great visual reference. Other artists, like Wayne Breaux Jr. and Freddie Williams II, do a great job, but the lion's share goes to Burles illustrations.

As far as adventures, this book only has one in Hook, Line, Sinker format dealing with the Coalition Death Camp, but there are enough seeds scattered throughout location and NPC descriptions that most GMs should get months worth of value out of the book.

I would have liked to see more details on some groups that changed alliances from Tolkeen to the Coalition. The break up of many volunteer units and the disillusionment mentioned would have made strong factors in crafting new power groups that stood against their former Tolkeen allies. A few more adventures would've made this product even better, but for \$12.95, you definitely get your money's worth here.

-- Joe G. Kushner

The Head That Wouldn't Die: The Baffling Baphomet

"Ed . . . you don't know what you're talking about!"

'Oh yes I do! I was a Mason until I found out about Baphomet!'

'Who?'

'This "Great Architect of the Universe" you pray to is NOT the God of the Bible . . . It's really Baphomet! And he's ugly, frightening and completely satanic.'

'That's impossible! I've never even heard that name. Have you, Sally?'

'No, I haven't.'

'Of course not, Sally. Most Masons don't learn about Baphomet . . . until they get to the highest degrees. Wait here, I've got a picture of him in the car. I'll be right back.' "

-- Alex, Ed, and Sally, in *The Curse of Baphomet*, by Jack T. Chick

Sadly, the picture Ed brings back from his car is not Baphomet at all, but the famed "Goat of Mendes" drawing (or "the Devil," in most Tarot decks), misnamed Baphomet by the excitable, if sloppy, Eliphas Levi. Of all the many things the tortured Templars described their putative idol as, a goat is not really on the list. So, without Ed to guide us, we shall have to look elsewhere for the truth. And perhaps, in the unblinking eyes of Baphomet, we'll see truths that will either raise us to superhuman levels of numinous power or send us shrieking back into welcome catatonia. But, let's not get ahead of ourselves.

"[Seek] a man's head with a large beard, which head they kiss and worship at all their provincial chapters, but this not all the brothers know, save only the Grand Master and the old ones."

-- from the instructions for the arrest of the Templars

The fifth article of accusation against the Templars held "that the brothers practiced idol worship of a cat or a head." The putative idol of the Templars (which, in the Real World, they sadly didn't possess, as Edward Burman notes in his *Supremely Abominable Crimes*) became known as "Baphomet" at some point during the trial. Whether the inquisitors or the tortured knights first named it remains uncertain. As, in fact, does the appearance of Baphomet -- of the 231 knights examined by the Inquisition, only 12 of them mentioned the head specifically. The consensus description is of a very fierce, bearded head, usually with long hair, and occasionally depicted with glowing eyes. However, Baphomet is also described as having two or three faces, being made of golden or silvery metal or of wood, being a human skull, or even being a woman's head. The formal charges of 1308 took this variance into account, arguing that "in each province the order had idols, namely heads, of which some had three faces and some one, and others had a human skull."

"Then it is really foolish to fight the Turks, now that Jesus Christ no longer opposes them. They have vanquished the Franks and Tartars and Armenians and Persians, and they continue to do so. And daily, they impose new defeats on us: for God, who used to watch on our behalf, is now asleep, and Bafometz puts forth his power to support the Sultan."

-- from a poem by the troubadour Ricaut Bonome, ca. 1265

The real explanation, prosaic as it may be, is that in Provençal, Mohammed (or Mahomet, to the medieval Europeans) is often rendered Bahomet, or Bafomet, or Bafometz. King Philip accused the Templars, essentially, of collaborating with the enemy by worshiping the "demon" Mahomet. (The fact that the last thing secret Muslims would do is worship a humaniform idol is enough to clear the Templars of both charges.) If the Templars did have a symbolic head in their commanderies (and aside from one dubious silver reliquary, no such head turned up when they were searched), it may have been the skull of the first Grand Master, Hugues de Payens. Whose coat of arms, it turns out, was three black heads on a golden field -- recalling both the gold and the "three faces" mentioned under torture.

". . . 'Bafomet' has no connection with Mohammed, but could well be a corruption of the Arabic abufihamet (pronounced in the Moorish Spanish something like 'bufihimat'). The word means 'father of understanding.' In Arabic, 'father' is taken to mean 'source, chief seat of,' and so on. In Sufi terminology, ras el-fahmat (head of knowledge) means the mentation of man after undergoing refinement - the transmuted consciousness."

-- Idries Shah, *The Sufis*

But before we go racing ahead toward our three faces, it's worth mentioning some of the other ingenious explanations people have offered over the years. By cleverly plugging B-P-W-M-T ("Baphomet") into the Atbash Cipher used in some of the Dead Sea Scrolls, maverick Biblical historian Hugh Schonfield gets SH-W-P-Y-A -- close enough to the Greek word "Sophia," or wisdom. Austrian Orientalist, Freemason, and diplomat Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall got to "wisdom" with less effort (and in 1818, no less), by deciding that the "met" in "Baphomet" was "Metis," the Titaness of Wisdom and mother of Athena. (Is the birth of Athena, female wisdom, from Zeus' male head an alchemical creation, recombined in Baphomet's androgyny?) The "Baphomet" was therefore the "Baptism in Wisdom." My personal favorite is another gem from the fevered brow of Eliphaz Levi -- "Baphomet" is actually "TEM. O.H.P. AB." backwards! That being short, you see, for *Templi omnium hominum pacis abbas*, meaning "In the Temple is the father of universal peace among men." The "father of peace" recalls Idries Shah's theory mentioned above that "Baphomet" is a corruption of the Arabic *abufihamet*, or "father of wisdom" (again with the wisdom!). One Frater Baraka goes even farther and assumes that the "abu-Fihamet" refers to an actual person, the Sufi master Hussein ibn-Mansur al-Hallaj, beheaded (!) in 922 A.D. and (says Sufi fan Ernest Scott in *The People of the Secret*) later known as "Hiram Abiff" (short for "Abifihamet"?) in Masonic lore. And there you have another Mason-Templar link, as if you needed one.

"Other descriptions, clearly referring to copies, included mention of gold and silver cases, wooden panels, and the like. But the Paris head is different. One gets the distinct impression that this was the holy of holies, accorded ceremonial strikingly reminiscent of that used by the Byzantines."

-- Ian Wilson, *The Shroud of Turin: The Burial Cloth of Jesus Christ?*

Of course, you don't need to postulate the Templars as secret Sufis to make the Baphomet a relic. Ian Wilson famously proposed the Shroud of Turin as the Baphomet, noting that one of the Templars burnt in 1314 along with Jacques de Molay was one Geoffroi de Charnay -- and the first recorded owner of the Shroud, in 1355, was one Geoffroi de Charny. De Charny was known as the "bearer of the sacred standard," and lived in Lirey, near the old Templar center of Troyes. The two-sided Shroud would give a "two-faced" figure, and if it was kept folded up in a reliquary with only the face visible it could seem a disembodied head to the lay membership. The Shroud (or the Baphomet) may also have been any of the sacred images of Christ's head from the "Mandylion" cloth of Edessa to the "Veronica" in Rome. Cooler still is the legend (recounted, among other places, in a continuation of the Templar-symp Chrétien de Troyes' *Perceval*) that St. Nicodemus brought a sacred head with him to Britain when he and Joseph of Arimathea fled there with the Grail: "Nicodemus had carved and fashioned a head in the likeness of the Lord on the day that he had seen Him on the cross. But of this I am sure, that the Lord God set His hand to the shaping of it, as they say; for no man ever saw one like it nor could it be made by human hands." Lynn Picknett and Clive Prince, of course, go even that theory one better, saying that the Grail and Baphomet were the same -- the severed head of John the Baptist, which the chronicler Robert de Clari says the Crusaders (including the Templars) looted from Constantinople in 1204.

"Now tell us about the head." "Well, the head. I've seen it at seven chapters held by Brother Hugh de Peraud and others." "What did one do to worship it?" "Well, it was like this. It was presented, and everyone threw himself on the ground, pushed back his cowl, and worshipped it." "What was its face like?" "Terrible. It seemed to me that it was the face of a demon, of a maufé. Every time I saw it I was filled with such terror I could scarcely look at it, trembling in all my members."

-- dialogue between an Inquisitor and a Templar, from *Procés des Templiers*, edited by Jules Michelet

From such heady altitudes, we plummet to the basest diabolism. Picknett and Prince agree that the Templars were, indeed, craniolatrous heretics; perhaps their magical head was the same as the "brazen head" built by Vergil Magus or the demoniac Pope Sylvester or the Templar-friendly magus Roger Bacon? The brazen head would, in fact, match the description of Baphomet as "reddish" as well as explain the various metallic Baphomets. Or, the head may also have been an older idol still, passed down from the ancient Celtic head-cults, or the worship of the fertility god Bran (Baphomet was said to make the trees flower and the land germinate), or even one of the carved faces from the Neolithic shamanic empire of [Glozel](#). Could Baphomet be the severed prophetic head of Orpheus, or of [Dionysos](#), or of his avatar St. George? St. George, of course, is a redaction not only of Dionysos but of Perseus -- slayer of Medusa, whose head inspired paralyzing fear in enemies. Could the Templars have dug up the head of the Gorgon? Medusa, of course, had two sisters, three hellish heads recalling the three-faced goddess Hecate -- and the three faces described on Baphomet by the terrified Templars.

"The point being, our whole planet's genetic intent roots are pirate genesplicers. Pieces of 8, were toroid shadows. Skull and Bones were Orion bone touch spark gap ritual imported into Templar mnemonics "Baphomet" Skull Touch. Jon & Magda's skull and bones after the templar banking cartel planets biggest navy got bad PR disappeared into Scotland and became the pirates, became the CIA. Always massaging the drug cartel for control of externalized disempowered borg psychokinesis access to the time wormholes."

-- Dan Winter, "Liberty Bell Rings Again, As Genes Sing of the Grail"

We can get in even deeper, as the waters of mystification close still further over our heads. [Bisociate](#) our boy Baphomet, then. Baphomet is Orpheus, and John the Baptist, and Bran the Blessed, and Medusa, and Metis. (Don't those names sound eerily similar?) All of them are aspects of the Watcher at the Threshold, the Opener of the Way -- *Bfmaat*, in Enochian, as I am reliably informed. Baphomet's "sparkling eyes" show his role as one of the Grigori, the Watchers -- the heads in the subsidiary commanderies serving as Orwellian telescreens for the Templars' true master in Paris -- or Babylon -- or Hell. If Baphomet is a mechanism, the Brazen Heads become individual control or interface terminals -- or, perhaps, all three were the same Head, reappearing or reconstructing itself from some demonic blueprint, a time-shifting (and hence "prophetic") AI. Perhaps the "Templar kiss" and the peculiar transference of "cords" from Baphomet to his worshipers truly referred to Baphomet's implanting of psychometric controls, or alien parasites, or a magic toad, in the skulls of his followers in a kind of [trepanative](#) impregnation. The central processor may be a holographic personality imprinted in the center of the [Crystal Skull](#), taken by the Templar Fleet to the [American Refuge](#) in Mexico. Like Yog-Sothoth, Baphomet is only dimly seen as "a congeries of (head-shaped) spheres" -- like the Grail, its shape is ever-shifting. Perhaps the Templars worshiped Baphomet -- or perhaps only their sorceries kept it penned up in their round churches and towers. Now that they're gone, Baphomet rules America from the Skull & Bones fraternity in Yale. Heads up!

Murphy's Rules



by John Kovalic

Murphy's Rules



Murphy's Rules



Dork Tower!



Dork Tower!



Friends Don't Let Friends Forward

Unfortunately, the column I wanted to write this week has been put on hold so I can talk about an item that, the more I think about it, the more upset I get. I also feel bad, because this column doesn't apply to the vast bulk of you. But I also believe this needs to be said . . . so here we go.

* * *

As I've reported here before, I was at the Gaming Invasion convention a couple of weekends ago, and someone came up to me and said (and I'm paraphrasing here):

"Hey, Steven! It's really great to meet you! I'm a big fan of what you're doing. (pause) Well, I haven't actually subscribed yet, but people are forwarding me stuff from the magazine all the time, and it's great!"

Now, I have many things in this world that I'm thankful for, but at that very moment I was particularly glad that I'd never consumed the contents of that mysterious bubbling vial from my mad scientist friend's lab a year earlier. For if I had, I'm sure that, at that moment, my muscles would have surged with all the raging fury an editor can summon, and I would have rended him limb from limb. (Either that, or my remaining hair would have fallen out . . . quality control on nature-tampering concoctions is sorely lacking.)

Those who know me would, I generally believe, consider me to be pretty easy-going. I almost never get angry. But I was angry then.

All the more upsetting, two other people made similar comments at this convention. And we're not exactly talking a GenCon-sized gathering here.

All of this reflects one of the sad truths of our little industry of fun:

If you don't buy it, we don't make money.

While this may seem pretty darn obvious, it's also seemed to elude the folks I met at that convention, and, presumably, whoever has sent *Pyramid* content to them.

Over in the message boards, a fair number of people make suggestions about how to improve the magazine. And while many of them are very good ideas, most of them break down to requiring either time or money (or both). And, really, the former is usually a version of the latter. Webmasters, writers, artists, and *<ahem>* editors need to buy their Ramen just like everyone else.

Unfortunately, we're limited with what we can accomplish. While we were profitable in 1999 (and, once we get the numbers in, I hope for 2000, too), we aren't so profitable that we don't appreciate every subscriber we can get. So when I hear of folks sending or getting sent articles from *Pyramid* -- folks who I doubt would swipe a boxed set from their FLGS or photocopy a game book for their pals -- it saddens me, and makes me wonder how many subscribers we *could* have. But the internet age makes it so easy to copy, paste, and email (or post to a website) that we may scarcely realize the implication of our actions.

Within the confines of our rules, we provide (in my opinion) a lot of leeway. You can tell your friends about an article. You can email them the sample link (where they'll get the first paragraph or two). You can -- if the article is Steve Jackson Games support -- possibly send them the sample link to get the full article. And you always have the right to print out one copy of an article; you can show or mail that printout to a friend. And those are all possibilities you have *without* needing to write to us for any special permissions or break the law.

From a professional standpoint, I want nothing more than for *Pyramid* to be the best it can be. But to grow, and improve, and become a mad whack voodoo publication, it needs your help. We have that, now, because you subscribe.

Thank you. Now I'm asking the few of you who may not understand . . . please don't hurt our potential for growth.

Or at the very least, *please* don't brag to me about it at a convention.

For more information on our policies, check out our [Copyright FAQ](#). If we can clarify anything (or, of course, if you want to write about anything else), feel free to contact me at pyramid@sjgames.com.

* * *

I fulfilled one of my personal geek-dreams this week by buying a personal document binding system. This is a device that punches the little rectangular holes along the edge of a packet, then lets you bind them on little plastic spiral-type combs (the sort you generally get from copy shops and college packets). I'd always wanted one of these, but all the devices I'd ever seen were *awfully* expensive. Well, I've finally found one that's meant for personal/light office use; it only punches around 5-6 pages at a time, and can only bind documents up to 100 pages thick (though I'm probably going to try to jury-rig something to use the larger binder combs at some point). It was about \$65 after tax, which is pretty expensive but will also pay for itself after a dozen bindings . . . so I'm not worried.



Anyway, with the growth of PDFs and other RPG downloads, I'm delighted to finally have a good way of printing and binding manuals. Already I've bound the first four volumes of my *Pyramid* printout archives (approximately four hundred pages covering the first six months of the online magazine), and I'll probably start trying to make physical versions of some of my favorite online electronic RPG documents real soon.

Even better, when I start my next campaign I'll be able to create actual booklets for my players with all the information they need. These *feel* more professional, useful, and "real" to me, somehow, than Duotang folders, 3-ring binders, or stapled packets. Even better, I'll be able to add and remove pages fairly easily from these packets, so I might have their character sheets, histories, and notes in there too. And, of course, if they find the Sinister Conspiracy's Secret File, I'll be able to create something *really* special.

But if you decide to buy one of these, make sure you take a friend who can intervene to ensure you only buy this item . . . *especially* if you're an [Office Depot](#) junkie, like I am.

-- Steven Marsh

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*Last week's answer: **GURPS Time Travel Adventures**, p. 7.*

*(Five stars) "**Field Gravity Detector:** This sensitive device is used to detect the presence, magnitude, and directional component of local gravitation fields. The field gravity detector requires no external or internal power source, drawing it's [*sic*] energy for operation from the local gravity field itself. The unit consists of a divided flattened cylindrical indicator body and a thin gauge tether, which is attached to the indicator body and the hand of the operator."*



by Volker Bach

" . . . then the Batavian auxiliaries began putting in their well-aimed sword thrusts, striking with their shield bosses, cutting up faces . . . "

Tacitus, *Agricola* 36, 2

" . . . first their quarters, then their wardes, blowes, thrusts, and breaking of thrusts, then their closes and gripes, striking with the hilts, Daggers, Bucklers, Wrastlings, striking with the foote or knee in the Coddes . . . "

George Silver, *The Paradoxes of Defense*

There are few GMs running fantasy campaigns who have not, at some point, been irked by the question: "Can I play a samurai?" That is, of course, because samurai (or ninjas, or Shao Lin monks, or just about every mysterious Asian fighter) are trained in the martial arts, while knights, longbowmen, legionaries, and bravos merely have some unconnected, unrelated and usually comparatively ineffective weapon skills. That this very widespread misconception is adopted wholesale by most roleplaying games does nothing to dispel it. The usual solutions are either to enforce (against the wishes of the players) running the campaign on a strictly western line, or populating the fantasy middle ages (or, for that matter, the historical medieval period) with wandering ninjas, outcast ronin, and enslaved Chinese fighter monks. A third option is to flesh out the fighting abilities of those legionaries, knights and Vikings with what we know of Europe's native Martial Arts tradition. It won't (and shouldn't) make them the equals of high-kicking cinematic Shao Lin monks, but it helps to close the "coolness gap" yawning between East and West in these matters.

The biggest problem facing enterprising GMs is that, while books and roleplaying supplements on Asian martial arts abound, the Western traditions that came before Renaissance fencing are obscure and little understood. Little or nothing of them survives to this day, and the written and pictorial sources are rare, full of gaps, and hard to interpret. The largely academic work done on the matter translates badly into roleplaying. However, it is possible, with some handwaving and a lot of educated guesswork, to put together a picture of western martial training.

The differences are obvious at first glance. Europe's martial arts tradition is mostly armed, using empty-hand techniques only to supplement weapon strikes. It is also utilitarian, almost completely lacking the mystique of the Oriental schools. There were no meditative or mystical elements in its swordplay, no religious significance in its kicks and grapples, and accordingly, tales of cinematic feats were few and far between. This does not mean that there was no sophistication, though. Wherever we get glimpses of them, combat styles were complex and refined, often including highly specialized and difficult moves as a matter of course. Any GM looking to include Martial Arts rules in his campaign will find them easily the equal of the more popular Eastern styles.

The descriptions of styles in this article are largely conjectural, with a lot of guesswork to fill in gaps. The decision whether to call an unarmed technique Brawling or Karate, Wrestling or Judo has been made conservatively. GMs should feel free to upgrade them whenever they feel it appropriate, generally tinker with the styles, and create personal and period varieties. We know these existed, though it is impossible to tell from the sources what they were like. The article also concentrates exclusively on combat styles used in war. 'Civilian' styles must have existed, but unfortunately we have no information about them after AD 300.

New Maneuvers

Hook (Hard) ***Defaults to Polearm-2, Axe/Mace-2, Two-Handed Sword-2 or Two-Handed Axe/Mace-2***
Prerequisite: Polearm, Axe/Mace, Two-Handed Axe/Mace or Two-Handed Sword
Cannot exceed prerequisite skill level

This attack can be used with every weapon that has a hook or hooked beak (halberds, picks, bearded axes, bills, daggeraxes, poleaxes and various exotic polearms fall into this category). A specialised form of the Maneuver is also used with the quillons of two-handed swords gripped by the *ricasso*. The attacker uses the hook to catch the target's limb, weapon or shield (the attack must be specifically targeted to one of these. Hit Location penalties apply).

A Hook attempt can be dodged, parried, or blocked. However, since the Hook does not depend on getting through armor, the PD of all armor is reduced by 2 for purposes of defending against this attack. After a successful Hook, the attacker pulls his weapon to put the target off balance. This pull happens on the same turn, immediately after the attack. If the weapon's hook is sharp this may cause some cutting damage in the process (GM's call. The amount should not exceed thr-1 even for the largest weapons). Armor protects fully. Other effects depend on what is hooked.

If a weapon is caught, the attacker may attempt to disarm the target. Roll a Quick Contest between the attacker's Hook and the defender's Weapon Skill or Retain Weapon Maneuver. If the attacker wins, the target is disarmed. If the defender wins he retains his weapon, but an unbalanced weapon is unready the following turn. Swords, knives and similar weapons without protrusions to catch onto can not be hooked. If a shield is hooked the attacker can pull it aside. Roll a Quick Contest between the attacker's Hook and the defender's Shield Skill. If the attacker wins, the shield becomes unready. The defender is prevented from blocking and loses the benefit of its PD until he can re-ready it.

If a limb or the neck is hooked, the attacker may pull the defender off balance. Roll a Contest of ST between the attacker and defender (the attacker is at -1 if he uses one hand only, +1 for a weapon with Reach 2, +2 for one with Reach 3. A mounted defender may substitute his Riding Skill for ST). If the weapon does damage to an unprotected location, the defender needs to make a Will Roll to force himself to resist the pull (+2 for Combat Reflexes, +4 for High Pain Threshold). If the attacker wins the Contest of ST, the defender is pulled off balance and can not use any attacks or Active Defenses the following round. If he wins by more than 2, the defender falls down. If the defender wins he keeps his balance and can act normally.

Mounted Shooting (Hard) ***Defaults to any Ranged Weapon Skill-4***
Cannot exceed prerequisite skill level; must specialize

In addition to the bow, cavalrymen can learn to competently use almost any ranged weapon while mounted. Javelins and darts were commonly used from horseback in Antiquity, crossbows in the late Middle Ages, and carbines and pistols in the modern world. This Maneuver represents such training. It reduces the penalty for shooting from a moving horse for other weapons in exactly the same manner that Horse Archery does for the Bow Skill.

Mounting Vault (Average) ***Defaults to Riding-3, Jumping Acrobatics or Equestrian Acrobatics***
Prerequisite: Riding

Before the introduction of the stirrup most riders were used to mounting their horses either with help from a comrade or by using a stepping stone. Cavalrymen, and anyone else who depended on speed and versatility, were trained to vault into the saddle. For an unencumbered man to jump on a standing horse with a 3-hex running start is at Riding-3. Add the rider's Encumbrance and the horse's Move, if any, to the Penalty. Rome's elite cavalrymen were able to leap onto a trotting horse in full armor.

Attempting to vault onto a horse is tricky. On a failure, roll vs. DX immediately. On a success the rider is left standing beside the horse looking stupid. On a failure he falls to the ground. A critical failure results in a fall and spooks the horse.

Swim with Mount (Average)

Defaults to Riding-4

Prerequisite: Riding

Cannot exceed prerequisite skill level

This Maneuver represents the ability to control a horse in the water. The Celtic and Germanic tribes of Northwestern Europe were masters of this art, and many Roman cavalrymen were trained specifically in it. A roll has to be made when entering the water and every time the rider tries to change direction or do anything other than just sit still. Obviously, the horse has to be trained to do this as well. The best horsemen were supposedly able to throw javelins, shoot bows and engage in swordfights while their mounts were swimming. Even less able cavalrymen using this Maneuver will be able to cross rivers, lakes and inlets without putting aside their armor and shield and emerge on the opposite bank fully battle-ready.

Twirling Javelin (Hard)

Defaults to Spear Throwing -2

Prerequisite: Spear Throwing

Cannot exceed prerequisite skill level

It is possible to throw a balanced javelin so that it flies end over end, like a throwing axe, rather than in a straight line. This allows the thrower to send the spear around an enemy's shield but requires a good eye for range to make sure the weapon doesn't impact sideways, or butt forward. A twirling javelin reduces the effective PD of a shield by 2 for all Active Defenses. However, it is less accurate (Acc 1) and has less range (1/2 Dam: ST, Max: ST x 1 1/2) than a regularly thrown javelin. The Twirling Javelin Maneuver was taught to Roman cavalrymen to fight shield-bearing warriors in close formation. It is impressive to look at, but not much use beyond this narrow specialty.

Antiquity

In spite of tantalising glimpses through Egyptian frescos, Assyrian reliefs and Syrian pottery we do not know enough to reconstruct the martial arts of the ancient Orient. Certainly these old and often warlike civilisations had sophisticated fighting techniques to teach to their warriors, though, and GMs wanting to speculate need not stick to the 'primitive' mode. However, our first glimpses of a recognisable fighting system in surviving sources comes from Greece and Rome.

In the Greek city states of the Classical age, every citizen was a soldier and martial skills were widespread and considered essential to a well-rounded upbringing. Even long after the citizen armies of the Classical *polis* had been abandoned, military training was part of a proper education for every male Hellene. For most, this meant little more than the basics of handling shield and spear and a degree of physical conditioning at the public *gymnasion*, but dedicated practitioners went farther than that. Eachers of the *hoplomachia* (lit. 'armed combat') as well as the empty-hand sports of boxing, wrestling and *pankration*, offered their services to eager youths. Their status was disputed, some thinking them essential to a city's military strength while others regarded them as dangerous men of doubtful morals. Indeed, some philosophers agued that this kind of training was detrimental to a soldier since it taught him how

to defend himself rather than rely on his comrades in the firm battle line.

HOPLOMACHIA

7/14 POINTS

Hoplomachoi led with their heavy round shields (PD 3, 15 lbs), often held out at an angle in front of the body or even horizontally, with the rim pointed at the opponent. Attacks were often led by shield bashes and executed with the spear, targeting unarmored locations. Fighters were trained to use the pointed butt spike aggressively when an occasion presented itself. Some used slashing broadswords as secondary weapons, but shortswords were more common. All were trained to grapple and stab with their swords or butt spikes in close combat.

Primary Skills: Shield; Spear; Wrestling

Secondary Skills: Boxing or Brawling; Broadsword or Shortsword; Running

Maneuvers: Close Combat (Broadsword or Shortsword); Hit Location (Spear); Lunge (Spear); Spinning Strike (Spear)

Cinematic Skills: Immoveable Stance

Cinematic Maneuvers: Enhanced Block

The Roman legionaries, starting out with the Greek tradition, developed a distinctive fighting style of their own. We can get a reasonably accurate picture of this *armatura* from the sources for the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD, when the Roman army was placed on a professional footing and the troops received thorough training. The basic forms were similar for legionaries, auxiliaries and marines, though the various arms emphasised different weapons. In many cities the young men of the upper and middle classes also took instruction in military combat styles as a matter of pride. The *armatura* was taught by professional instructors, sometimes brought in from gladiatorial schools. Roman soldiers positively prided themselves of their knowledge of dirty tricks, and any number of unsporting Maneuvers could reasonably be added to the style.

ARMATURA

7/-- POINTS

Roman soldiers were trained to lead with their shields carried on the long arm and used aggressively to bash or shove the enemy. They attacked with the sword around the sides, preferring the stab to the cut so as not to expose themselves. Auxiliaries also used a stabbing spear. Close combat techniques were less emphasised.

Primary Skills: Broadsword (for auxiliaries) or Shortsword (for legionaries), Hiking; Shield; Spear (for auxiliaries) or Spear Throwing (for legionaries)

Secondary Skills: Brawling; Knife; Spear Throwing (for auxiliaries) or Spear (for legionaries); Wrestling

Optional Skills: Axe/Mace; Bow; Riding (horse); Sling; Swimming

Maneuvers: Feint (Broadsword or Shortsword); Hit Location (Broadsword or Shortsword); Retain Weapon (Broadsword or Shortsword)

Cinematic Skills or Maneuvers: The Roman legions were a prosaic bunch, and few legendary feats of arms are reported. However, given the great store Roman writers put by the stamina and bravery of their troops, several levels of Extra Fatigue and Fearlessness as well as the Immoveable Stance Skill seem appropriate. Power Blow (shortsword), Enhanced Block and Kiai (the *barritus* battlecry) also fit the mix.

The cavalymen of the Roman Empire combined the martial traditions of the various subject peoples into a composite, highly effective fighting style that blended standoff engagements (every cavalryman had to be proficient with either the javelin or the bow) with hand-to-hand techniques. It survived through much of the Dark Ages. More heavily armored, carrying a longer spear and less reliant on the shield, the cavalymen of Byzantium and Dark Age Europe used a similar style. Byzantine cavalymen were trained with the bow while Western ones usually used the javelin. A historical 'Knight of King Arthur' would be trained in the *armatura equestris*.

ARMATURA EQUESTRIS

13/-- POINTS

The horsemen of the Roman Empire faced the enemy with their shield side, protected by a medium shield of light construction wielded in a mobile blocking style. Some were trained as mounted archers (slipping the shield behind their back on a sling rather than abandoning it altogether), but the majority used the spear and javelin as their main arms. Thrusting broadswords similar to those used by the auxiliaries were worn and competently handled by all Roman cavalymen. (Some cavalymen were recruited from the infantry and already were fully trained in the *armatura*).

Primary Skills: Bow [2] or Spear Throwing; Broadsword; Riding (Horse); Shield; Spear

Secondary Skills: Knife; Swimming; Wrestling

Optional Skills: Axe/Mace; Brawling; Fast Draw (Arrow or Javelin)

Maneuvers: Direct Mount; Fighting While Mounted (Spear); Fighting While Mounted (Broadsword); Hit Location (Spear); Horse Archery or Mounted Shooting (Javelin); Mounting Vault; Swim with Mount; Twirling Javelin (javelineers only)

Cinematic Skills and Maneuvers: No cinematic Skills or Maneuvers other than incredibly high levels of skill with their ranged weapons are reported of Roman cavalymen (one of them left an epitaph commemorating how he shot an arrow into the air, then split it in two with a second before it hit the ground, while on the back of a swimming horse in the middle of the Danube!). Some units were specifically trained to cross bodies of water with their mounts in formation.

The Middle Ages

To historians of the martial arts the proverbial Dark Ages extend from AD 400 right up to AD 1300. Some texts and paintings offer rare glimpses of combat techniques that reasonably could (and probably did) combine into a coherent whole, but before the turn of the fourteenth century this material is scarce. However, the very sophistication of the martial techniques that come to light after this date point to a highly developed earlier tradition. It is not unreasonable to suppose that the fighting men of barbarian and medieval Europe kept their battle edge finely honed.

The warriors of Migration Era Europe (c. AD 450-800), including the Vikings, practiced a style we know only in outline. It was partly born from Germanic traditions and partly developed from Late Roman military training but unique in its style. Traditionally, strength was the most admired attribute in a warrior, though speed and dexterity counted for a lot in practice. The most common main weapon was the spear, with many warriors carrying several light ones for throwing and a heavier thrusting weapon for close-quarter fighting. Wealthier men used heavy broadswords geared primarily towards slashing blows, with axes and large fighting knives (Shortsword Skill) still commonly used in battle. Large, light wooden shields were carried by almost everyone, but armor was rarer than in preceding periods. The shields were flimsy by Roman or Greek standards and quickly disintegrated in battle, but they were well suited for this fluid, mobile foot combat style.

MIGRATION ERA FOOT COMBAT

10/18 POINTS

Warriors trained in this school led with their light shields, actively blocking incoming blows and missiles. The shields were quickly destroyed in battle until only the iron boss remained, which was used as a weapon of defense and offense in the left hand (this may be the origin of the sword-and-buckler play that became a style in its own right in later medieval Europe). Parrying with the weapon was only the last line of defense. The main weapons of attack were the spear and axe or (if they owned one) the sword. Very strong men sometimes specialised in the two-handed axe after c. 1000.

Primary Skills: Brawling; Shield; Spear; Spear Throwing; one of Axe/Mace, Broadsword, or Shortsword

Secondary Skills: Bow; Buckler; Two-Handed Axe/Mace; Wrestling

Optional Skills: Axe Throwing; Knife; Riding (Horse); Swimming

Maneuvers: Close Combat (Sword or Axe/Mace); Hit Location (Spear); Hook (Axe); Kicking; Off-Hand Weapon Training (Sword or Axe/Mace)

Cinematic Skills: Kiai; Power Blow (Sword or Axe/Mace)

Cinematic Maneuvers: Enhanced Block

With the rise of the knights (*milites*) in the 10th to 12th centuries, mounted combat techniques come once again into focus in the sources. Aristocratic fighting men were trained from an early age, and standards were high (Hrabanus Maurus wrote that a boy not trained to be a fighter from age 12 would never be up to scratch). Foot combat, while still taught, was no longer emphasised, to the point where the mounted warrior was thought the only true warrior.

EARLY KNIGHTLY MOUNTED COMBAT

12/14 POINTS

The early knights relied heavily on their large round or kite-shaped shields to protect themselves. They led with the shield side both on foot and mounted, attacking with long spears one-handed. Their broadswords, status symbols and main weapons in man-to-man combat, were used mostly to deliver overarm slashing blows. Stirrups were common and the spear was occasionally seen couched under the right arm, though their saddles did not yet give the support needed for a true 'couched lance' attack and overarm blows, stabs and throws were equally familiar attack modes.

Primary Skills: Broadsword; Riding (Horse) [2]; Shield; Spear; Wrestling

Secondary Skills: Axe/Mace; Brawling; Knife; Spear Throwing

Optional Skills: Animal Handling; Bow; Swimming; Throwing

Maneuvers: Direct Mount; Fighting while Mounted (Broadsword); Fighting while Mounted (Spear); Hit Location (Spear); Mounting Vault; Retain Weapon (Spear)

Cinematic Skills: Power Blow (Spear); Kiai

Cinematic Maneuvers: None are specifically mentioned, but Enhanced Block would be in character.

In the 12th century a slightly different style of combat was developed that remained common in outline well into the 14th century. This is the more stereotypical 'knight' in a long hauberk and mail chausses, a coat of plates on his torso and a fully enclosed great helm, all in bright heraldic colors. Around this time the 'couched lance' style became the knight's trademark attack to the exclusion of most other uses. Horsemanship was still all-important and training had to begin at an early age to gain proficiency.

HIGH MEDIEVAL KNIGHTLY MOUNTED COMBAT

11/12 POINTS

Knights of the high middle ages were still skilled in multirole combat, but the emphasis was much more on horsemanship and the use of the lance. They led with the right, often discarding the shield altogether, and increasingly avoided dismounting. Their style of swordsmanship began to favor the stab over the slash (this is a good place to implement the Primacy of the Point Optional Rule from SWp. 23), and parrying became more important as shields shrank. Swords in the period were made longer, and fighters began to develop the habit of gripping them with two hands for extra power (+1 damage).

Primary Skills: Axe/Mace; Broadsword; Lance; Riding (horse) [2]; Wrestling

Secondary Skills: Bow or Crossbow; Brawling; Buckler; Knife; Shield

Optional Skills: Animal Handling; Climbing; Spear

Maneuvers: Direct Mount; Fighting While Mounted (Axe/Mace); Fighting While Mounted (Broadsword); Hit Location (Lance); Tip Slash (Lance)

Cinematic Skills: Power Blow (Broadsword)

Cinematic Maneuvers: None are mentioned, but Enhanced Parry and Enhanced Block are both defensible.

Into the Renaissance

Rare manuscripts and notes by chroniclers and poets afford us a glimpse of the martial arts as practised in Europe after 1300. The whole topic is too wide to be included in this article in full, but as many of the texts deal with combat practised by the knightly classes they can be used to piece together a view of what a knight's combat training looked like at the time.

(Editor's note: A fuller treatment of the various weapon styles taught in Europe between 1250 and 1500 will be found in the companion article "Vechten unde Schirmen," appearing next month.)

In the later 14th and 15th centuries the picture of knightly combat changed drastically. Highly developed armor and the relative uselessness of the lance against disciplined infantry forced knights to abandon their cherished heavy cavalry role in favor of a more versatile training in foot and mounted combat. Great emphasis was placed on agility and speed in heavy armor as a man's survival increasingly depended on his ability to parry or dodge incoming blows - shields were almost completely abandoned. The free left hand could now lend extra force to blows and aid parries and trick strokes in the two-handed weapon techniques that became a regular feature of martial training at the time. Knights adopted the thrusting bastard sword and poleaxe as their principal weapons, developing mastery of both into refined arts.

LATE MEDIEVAL KNIGHTLY COMBAT

15/-- POINTS

Late medieval knights faced their opponent squarely or leading with the left. They discarded the shield in favor of two-handed weapons, favoring the 6-7' poleaxe with thrusting spikes on either end. This was held by a centered grip like a staff, diagonally in front of the body for better parrying ability. The bastard sword was often handled in a similar fashion, concentrating on defense. (GMs may want to consider allowing the Improved Parry Maneuver for Two-Handed Sword). Refined grappling techniques and a repertoire of knife moves to complement them rounded out their foot combat training. On horseback they were limited almost completely to their role as lancefighters, though they trained with the bastard sword for single combat against cavalry and infantry. Maces and picks were widely carried as secondary weapons for their armor-piercing ability.

Primary Skills: Axe/Mace; Lance; Polearm; Riding (Horse); Staff; Two-Handed Sword; Judo

Secondary Skills: Brawling; Broadsword; Knife

Optional Skills: Animal Handling; Spear

Maneuvers: Close Combat (Knife); Counterattack (2-Hd. Sword); Direct Mount; Fighting While Mounted (2-Hd. Sword); Hit Location (2-Hd. Sword); Hook (Polearm); Spinning Strike (Polearm); Sweep (Polearm)

Cinematic Skills and Maneuvers: the emphasis on parrying ability by contemporary instructors makes Enhanced Parry credible.

The Horsemen of Islam

The fighting style of the early Muslim armies is still shrouded in mystery, around the 13th century we begin to get a picture of the training Islamic elite mounted fighters received. In defiance of a long-standing myth Islamic horsemen wore armor, often more than their Christian opponents. However, their training and tactics fitted them better to the role of light cavalry. Their reliance on the bow prevented them from using large shields and furthered the development of a two-handed lancefighting style more like the Roman tradition than the Frankish. They were also very fond of exotic weapons such as fire siphons, naphtha grenades and crossbows that could shoot primitive molotov cocktails! Contemporary with the knights, a class of professional warrior emerged in the Islamic world that developed this style to a fine art. It is from the Mamluks of Egypt, soldiers purchased on the slave markets and trained from childhood, that training manuals detailing the *furusiyya* (combat horsemanship) survive. Keep in mind, though, that not all Islamic warriors were trained to such exacting specifications.

FURUSIYYA

15/23 POINTS

Practitioners of *furusiyya* were trained in a fast-paced, fluid style of combat keeping their distance from their enemies and engaging them only on ground of their choosing. Mounted, they alternated between showering the enemy with arrows and swooping in for a devastating lance attack. Their swordsmanship emphasised the cutting stroke and some of them used an intriguingly cinematic two-sword style.

Primary Skills: Bow; Broadsword; Riding (Horse) [2]; Spear

Secondary Skills: Axe/Mace; Fast-Draw (Arrow); Knife; Lance; Shield; Wrestling

Optional Skills: Brawling; Crossbow; Equestrian Acrobatics; Fire Siphon; Throwing

Maneuvers: Attack and Fly Out; Fighting While Mounted (Spear) [2]; Fighting While Mounted (Broadsword); Hit Location (Spear); Hit Location (Broadsword); Horse Archery; Mounting Vault; Off-Hand Weapon Training (Broadsword)

Cinematic Skills: Zen Archery would be appropriate, though the flavor is very different from the meditative Kyudo.

Cinematic Maneuvers: Dual Weapon Attack (Broadsword); Enhanced Parry

Further Reading

Unfortunately, most books on the subject are in German or French. There are some useful sources available in English, though. A good start, and within financial reach of most roleplayers, are the lavishly illustrated military history books by Osprey Books. To pursue the matter further, you may want to look at these books:

- Anglo, S. *The Martial Arts of Renaissance Europe.*
- Connolly, P. *Greece and Rome at War.*
- Nicolle, D. *Oriental Military Equipment; The Crusades.*
- Poliakoff, M. B. *Combat Sport in the Ancient World.*

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Thanks to Michael Hornbostel, Andi Jones, Nigel McCarthy-Eigenmann, David P. Summers, Johannes Trimmel and the Saturday Bunch for playtesting and comments.



A Tour of the Workshop

by William H. Stoddard

GURPS Low-Tech, like a medieval cathedral, was the work of many hands. It received one of the most extensive playtests of any *GURPS* title; many sections were virtually completely rewritten as a result of playtest discussion. A number of playtesters contributed valuable additional material, notably the character sketches by Jason Morningstar and David Morgan-Mar. And like a cathedral, its building involved a great deal of scaffolding that was taken down when it was done, leaving no visible trace in the finished product.

Like the other Tech volumes, *Low-Tech* was intended to stand on its own, so that anyone who owned the *GURPS Basic Set* and *Compendium I* could use it. The published volume makes almost no reference to *GURPS Vehicles*. But the vehicles and artillery weapons in *Low-Tech* needed to be compatible with *GURPS Vehicles* -- and that meant building all them them using the *Vehicles* rules, to make sure it could be done. These designs are the largest body of "hidden text" in *Low-Tech*. So here is a look at how they were created.

Boats and Ships

From the beginning of civilization up to at least 1800 A.D., large ships were the most sophisticated products of human technology. *GURPS Low-Tech* presents statistics for over 30 such ships, as well as a variety of boats and rafts. Most of the design process was a straightforward application of *GURPS Vehicles*, but a few additional rules were needed to cover options not considered there.

A ship at TL1-3, or a boat at TL0-3, consists of one or more propulsion systems (paddles, oars, poles, or sails); space for the crew to man them and for the officers and passengers; space for cargo; and a hull, which in terms of *GURPS Vehicles* includes a frame, a modest amount of armor (usually wooden), and waterproofing. Warships also have weapons systems, such as rams, catapults, or Greek fire siphons. The volume of the hull has to be sufficient to hold everything else.

So far as propulsion is concerned, *GURPS Vehicles* provides statistics for oars and sails, but not for paddles or poles. Paddling uses the strength of only the upper body; based on this, a paddling position can be estimated to take up the same volume as a rowing position, 10 cf, but to have half the weight, cost, and thrust: 5 lbs., \$10, and 0.25 times the ST of the paddler, in pounds of thrust. Poling is normally done while standing on the deck, and thus requires deck room (9 sf per man) but no space within the hull of the craft. For convenience, the weight and cost of the pole can be included as part of the crewman's personal gear and disregarded. Its effective thrust can be taken as 0.5 times the ST of the poler, the same as for rowing, and more efficient than paddling; but note than poles can only be used in shallow water.

Sails are extensively discussed in *GURPS Vehicles*, which divides them into three types: square-rigged, fore-and-aft, and full-rigged. There were actually many other types of sails, but their differences in performance are often fairly subtle. *GURPS Vehicles* classifies the lateen-rigged sails of Arabian ships as a variant on fore-and-aft rigging; the exotic sail designs of Polynesian seagoing canoes can also be placed in this category, based on their ability to beat upwind.

Crew requirements depend mainly on the system of propulsion and the number of watches. Paddled, poled, and oared craft need very large crews; however, up through TL2 they almost always spent their nights ashore, so they needed no accommodations and no space for a second watch. Sailing ships needed far smaller crews to man their sails (see p. VE75). However, sailing ships often spent nights at sea and carried two watches, doubling the crew size. In either case, a few more crew could be added as officers: a lookout, a coxswain, a steersman, and a captain, for example. Late TL3 and early TL4 voyages of exploration carried even larger crews, often by a further doubling, to allow for the risks of long voyages. Sailing ships, starting at late TL2, had galleys and a few cabins, but the crew typically still slept on deck, or in rowed ships such as Viking longship on their rowing benches.

The number of oarsmen can be estimated from the length of the ship, or vice versa. The dimensions of the human body require roughly 3 feet of length between one oarsman and the next. In addition, part of the ship's length fore and aft cannot accommodate oarsmen; the length of a ship's side needs to be at least 5 feet per oarsman seated along it, and slightly higher in some craft such as canoes. It's possible to fit in more oarsmen, either by stacking them above and below, in two or three levels, or by seating them side by side, or sometimes both. The Chinese yichuan must have had some such arrangement, for example; its 79 feet could have held no more than 16 oarsmen per side, or 32 total, but its complement was 48, so they were probably seated two to a bench on each side for a total of 12 benches on each side.

Estimating cargo space was even more complex. *GURPS Vehicles* allows 20 lbs. of cargo per cf for generic cargo. For specialized bulk carriers, an estimate of 50 lbs. per cf is reasonable for such cargoes as grain, oil, or wine (allowing for space between jars of oil or wine). For ships with a stated burden, the weight can be divided by one of these numbers to obtain a cargo volume. If the burden of the ship is unknown, the cargo volume can be estimated by multiplying the length, beam, and draft of the ship and dividing by 4. (If the draft is unknown, set it at half the beam; if the beam is unknown, base it on the ship's lines -- 1/3 to 1/5 the length for mediocre lines, 1/5 to 1/7 for average lines, 1/8 for fine lines. Most cargo ships had mediocre lines.) If the ship carries open cargo, rather than having a hold, only half the total volume of cargo is considered to be within the hull; that is, double the effective cargo space.

Adding up the space for rowing or paddling positions, the crew and passenger space, and the cargo space gives the volume inside the ship's hull. After adjustment for the ship's lines (see p. VE16), this gives the surface area of the ship (see p. VE18). And at this point things get complicated.

GURPS Vehicles distinguishes a vehicle's structure and armor -- though both have weight and cost proportional to surface area -- and specifies that to be sealed, a vehicle must have armor (which may not be open frame armor) over its entire surface. This seems to imply construction like that of Age of Sail ships, where structure represents the internal frame of the ship and armor represents its hull, or outer skin. But ancient shipwrights seldom followed this model. Typical ships were built hull first, with hull members fastened directly to each other rather than to a frame; partial frames were added afterward for extra strength. Small boats might have no frame at all; dugout canoes were simply carved from logs and all one piece.

For most of these cases, the *GURPS Vehicles* definitions can be forced to fit by assuming that "structure" includes the fasteners that hold the hull together. A craft with only cord fasteners, such as an Arabian sewn boat, has a super-light frame; a craft with clamps, nails, dowels, or the like has an extra-light frame. Adding internal bracing such as ribs increases frame strength from super-light to extra-light or from extra light to light. Most frames are considered to be of standard materials; boats sewn with coarse rope have cheap materials, while the elaborate joinery of triremes counts as expensive materials. Wooden boats usually have standard wood armor, though tropical hardwoods count as expensive wood armor. Bark and leather and basketry are all nonrigid armor.

Dugout canoes are a different case. They actually have no frames at all. Instead, the same weight of material is counted both as structure and as armor. First determine the base weight for 1 sf of structure of the appropriate cost class and TL. Then determine the actual hull weight per sf from DR and type of material, and divide this by the base weight to get a percentage. Multiply the surface area of the craft by 1.5 and then by this percentage to get the HP. This double benefit should only be allowed when the entire craft is carved or shaped from one piece of rigid material. A similar process could be used for the clay tub; however, to reflect the brittleness of its material (in effect, low-tech ablative armor), it is considered as having 0 HP -- any damage that gets through its DR causes hull failure.

Rafts

A different approach is needed to design rafts. *GURPS Vehicles* assumes that a vehicle is, in effect, a hollow box, with components, cargo, and crew in the hollow interior. But a raft has no interior. In effect, it is a top deck (p. VE94) with no body underneath. Trying to determine a volume in cf and work out its design from that involves arbitrary assumptions and leads to unrealistic results. Instead, raft characteristics should be computed directly from area in sf.

A raft is typically a number of logs fastened together in some way. If the fastening is cords, reeds, or withies (lengths of willow), treat this as super-light structure, with a 0.1 weight multiplier (2 lbs. per sf at TL0 1). If it is wooden crossbeams, treat this as extra-light structure, with a 0.25 weight multiplier (5 lbs. per sf at TL0-1). The weight of the logs themselves can be found as follows. A squared-off log with a 1-ft. cross section has a volume of 1 cf per foot of length; p. VE88 gives 30 lbs. as the appropriate weight. If the log is cylindrical, the weight is reduced to 78.5%, or 23.5 lbs. per foot of length. Multiply this by the length of a log and by the number of logs to get the total weight of the wood.

If the thickness of the logs is reduced to 6 in., the weight per log is reduced to 5.9 lbs. per foot of length, a factor of 4; but since the logs are only half as wide, twice as many are needed for the same width, and the overall reduction is by a factor of 2. In general, if the raft area stays the same, any reduction in thickness produces a proportionate reduction in weight and cost for the wood. The DR and HP for each section of a square log can be taken from p. B125; for cylindrical logs, multiply by 78.5% again.

Rafts can be built of other materials, such as the reeds the Egyptians favored. Reed bundles are half again as thick as wood of the same weight; for that weight, they have the same HP but 50% as much DR.

How much can a raft support? Flotation capacity has nothing to do with the volume of the raft, but is based on the relative weights of the raft material and water. Since 30 lbs. of wood occupy 1 cf, they displace 1 cf of water, which weighs 62.5 lbs. So if the piece of wood is carrying 32.5 lbs. of added weight, it exactly equals the water it displaces and the water will be level with the top of the raft. If it is carrying half as much added weight, the water will be roughly three-fourths of the way up the side of the rafts, and so on. Similarly, reed bundles weigh 20 lbs. per cf, allowing them to support 42.5 lbs of added weight; in compensation, they have a lower DR.

Building a Trireme

The ancient ship on which the most detailed information is available is the trireme. Its construction has been debated for centuries. Unfortunately, no actual triremes survive, even as wrecks, but the sheds that housed them have been found in Athens, and there are detailed inventories of various pieces of material and equipment that went into them. Based on this information, an actual trireme was built and its performance tested several years ago. Given all this, the trireme is the ideal ship to illustrate ship construction rules for ancient and medieval times. (See the *GURPS Low-Tech* bibliography for sources of more information.)

A trireme is a long, narrow ship; the hull is 120' long and 12' wide. It carries oarsmen on three levels: down inside the hull, rowing through oarports (27 on each side); along the side at the usual height (27 on each side); and in a superstructure overhanging the side (31 on each side). The ship also carries 5 officers, 11 sailors, and 14 marines. The superstructures are 90' long and 6' wide, of which 2' extends past the side of the main hull, making the total structure 16' wide. (They are traditionally called "outriggers," but they are nothing like the structures on Polynesian canoes.) There is a 25' foremast and a 35' mainmast; typically only one is used at a time, and in battle the ship relies on the oars.

Given the basic requirement for 3' front-to-back space per oarsman, the superstructures can just barely hold the top level of oarsmen. The total ship length is a bit short of the 5' overall length per oarsmen for the bottom two rows. The entire design is organized to fit in the absolute maximum of rowing power. The purpose of all this power is to drive a ram through the water at the highest attainable speed, allowing the trireme to incapacitate enemy ships.

Using the tables in *GURPS Vehicles*, the lowest 54 oarsmen need 540 cf for their equipment and 1080 cf for cramped seats, all in the body. The next 54 oarsmen need the same space for equipment, but 1620 cf for normal seats; of this, 810 cf is in the body (in effect, they occupy normal exposed seats); the other 810 cf in the superstructures. The top 62 oarsmen are entirely in the superstructures, where they take up 620 cf for equipment and 1,860 cf for normal seats. The body also has space for five roomy exposed seats for the officers, 100 cf, and 180 cf of stores. This totals 3,250 cf in the body (increased to 4,225 cf by fine lines) and 1,645 cf in each superstructure. This produces areas of 1,570 sf for the body and 840 sf for each superstructure. The body has a light, expensive frame (1,178 HP) and expensive wood armor (DR 5); the superstructures have extra-light, expensive frames (315 HP) and expensive wood armor (DR 2), open-frame except on top, supplemented by leather curtains along the sides (DR 4) to screen the oarsmen from arrows.

The two masts, if both in use, carry square-rigged sails with 720 sf of total area. The ship is waterproofed, and the front is a massive ram. The crew includes 30 officers, sailors, and marines, in addition to the 170 oarsmen. The trireme carries a bare minimum of supplies and is not designed to spend a night at sea; its crew expect to beach it at night and launch it in the morning. In short, it is more like a fighter airplane than a warship of the Age of Sail.

Empty weight is 48,000 lbs; crew and provisions raise this to 88,360 lbs. A size of 7,515 cf gives a +6 modifier to hit. Top speed works out to 11 mph under oars, or 13 mph in full sail with a favorable wind; in practice the ship relies on oars in battle. Draft is 3.9' when fully loaded; that is, this is a very light ship. This covers most of the key points in vehicular design, and shows that even a remarkably sophisticated watercraft at TL2 can be worked out fairly quickly by a GM who wants a full *GURPS Vehicles* design.

At this point, it's useful to do a check of the volume against the dimensions. The hull cross section is nearly triangular (historians compare it to a wine glass), and thus has roughly half the area of a square cross-section; it also tapers to prow and stern, so its average cross section is roughly half its maximum cross section. Dividing hull volume of 3,2500 cf by length of 120' gives average cross section 27 sf, or maximum cross section 54 sf. A triangle with base 12' (the maximum beam) and height 9' has area 60 sf. This seems close enough to suggest that the design is reasonably accurate.

Mechanical Artillery

After the era of the trireme, warships shifted to relying primarily on mechanical artillery, and such weapons were also used in land warfare, especially during sieges. Ships up through the early Roman Empire carried both of the two main types of artillery then in use, the bolt-throwing scorpion and the stone-throwing ballista.

The scorpion was a relatively light weapon; a typical weight for one carried on a ship was 110 lbs. From the design rules in *GURPS Vehicles* (pp. VE97-100), this indicates a ST 37 weapon (37 x 37 x 0.8 for torsion x 0.1 = 109.5); thrusting damage for this ST is 4d, increased by 1d to 5d. Cost can be computed to be \$5,020, rounded for convenience to \$5,000.

The ballista was a heavier weapon. Exact weights are not available, but ballistas were rated by the weight of the stones they hurled, typical weights being 1 talent (about 60 lbs.) or one-half, one-third, or one-fourth talent. Ships carried light ballistas firing 15-lb. stones. This indicates a weapon of ST 150, which would weigh 4,500 lbs. Swinging damage for such a weapon is 16d. Cost for such a weapon is \$13,800.

Thus, a Roman quinquereme with 9 scorpions and 2 ballistas would have \$72,600 worth of armaments. This makes up more than half its total cost of \$135,000.

The Fire Lance

The single largest change in the weapons lists for *GURPS Low Tech* was in the specifications for the fire lance. The version in *GURPS China* is effectively a primitive one-shot musket. But the actual description gives a different impression: a combustion chamber mounted on the end of a long pole with its exhaust directed at the enemy. Damage from such an attack would be comparable to that from a large, hot fire (1d-1). The exhaust would have no great range;

rocket exhaust damage is quartered for each 2 yards distance from the engine (p. VE163), which would effectively reduce damage to 0 after 2 yards. Like a rocket, a fire lance could be expected to burn for several seconds, allowing multiple attempts to catch a foe in the exhaust.

The basic technique for wielding a fire lance involved swinging a long, heavy pole about; this amounts to Polearm skill. Assuming a 3-yard pole, the effective range would be 3-5 yards. A fringe benefit of this redesign was that the fire lance became significantly more exotic -- in effect, a nonmagical flaming melee weapon.

Nearly all of this analysis is invisible in the published book, which is as it should be. But some readers will want to see "the little man behind the curtain." This article is for them.



by James Maliszewski

Around the World in 80 Thrills is a four-part Cliffhangers adventure set in the 1930s (the popular "world on the brink of war" setting). One part will appear each month from now until May. Each part is written by a different author, making this also a Round Robin event:

- Part One: [The Kensington Codex](#) -- Steven Marsh
- Part Two -- James Maliszewski
- Part Three: [The Minos Touch](#)-- Bob Portnell
- Part Four: [The Atlantis Crystal](#) -- Steve Kenson

Stats are presented for **GURPS**. Additional stats appearing for *Fudge* presented in **bold italic red**. Stats for *Big Eyes, Small Mouth 2nd Edition* have also been presented in blue boxes with white text. The adventures should also be generic enough that they can be used in a variety of systems.

Because much of this installment's action takes place in Shanghai, China and the surrounding area, GMs are referred to the article "[Middle Kingdom of Crime: Shanghai in the 1920s](#)" for background information that might lend additional flavor to this scenario.

"When Suddenly . . ."

The sound of breaking glass, followed by a large thud, resounds throughout the silent Fellows' Quadrangle. The ensuing echo only heightens the realization that something is terribly wrong. Either something untoward has happened to Dr. Hartwick or someone has entered his room ahead of you. Neither option offers any comfort. When you arranged the trip to Oxford, you thought it'd be a simple matter of consulting with a noted professor of Egyptology -- but you were you wrong. Why do you always have to be wrong?

What's Going On

The characters have come to Merton College, Oxford to consult with Dr. Nigel Hartwick, a noted professor of Egyptology regarding the discovery of an unusual key. The key was found in the binding of an ancient Norse codex unearthed in Kensington, Minnesota (as players of "The Kensington Codex" will know). This discovery is highly unusual -- and not simply because the existence of a Viking settlement so far inland on North America was previously unproven.

More interesting is the key. Scholars who've examined the key were skeptical of its authenticity, as the Norse weren't

well known for their skills as locksmiths, especially not in the 10th century (the supposed date of the Kensington settlement). This skepticism was only heightened by the revelation of odd carvings along on its length, carvings that are not Viking runes at all but appear to be Old Kingdom Egyptian hieroglyphics!

The characters have thus traveled to England in order to seek Dr. Hartwick's opinion on the matter. Whether they have done this on their own initiative or at the behest of a patron (such as Dr. Reginald Spires from "The Kensington Codex") makes no difference to the course of the adventure. All that matters is that they've journeyed to Oxford to meet Dr. Hartwick -- only to find someone has beaten them to his office!

Inside the Office

The characters are now outside Hartwick's office on the evening in which they've arranged to meet him. From inside the office, they can hear what sounds like a rather crude effort to search his office. The sounds of breaking glass and wood echo through the deserted hallways of the building. The characters must now decide whether or not to enter the office and, if they do so, how to proceed.

Inside the office are two Chinese thugs sent to England by Lee Cheng, a Shanghainese gangster-politician with delusions of grandeur. Lee sent his goons to Oxford for their own "consultation" with the learned professor. When they arrived, they found him missing. Rather than return to Shanghai empty-handed, the two thugs (named Fan and Yi) decided to search Hartwick's office for something -- anything -- that might satisfy their boss's interest in the professor.

Fan and Yi are armed with revolvers, but don't expect anyone to enter the office this late at night. If the characters act with some degree of forethought, they should have relatively little difficulty surprising the goons. Of course, the thugs have no compunction against violence and will do their best to avoid being defeated by the characters.

The Game Master can run the struggle with the gangsters however he wishes, even introducing additional elements for maximum pulp effect, such as a student who accidentally stumbles upon the scene. There are only three requirements for its proper execution. The first is to emphasize the oddity of two Chinese mobsters rifling through a professor of Egyptology's office. The second is to ensure that at least one of the goons survives to be interrogated. Given that both Fan and Yi are cowards, this shouldn't be too hard to arrange for a clever GM. The third requirement is that the characters find an unusual symbol carved into Hartwick's desk. The symbol looks like a thin mountain surrounding by clouds.

Spill the Beans, Punks!

If interrogated, Fan and Yi explain they were sent to ask Professor Hartwick to come with them to Shanghai. Their employer, Lee Cheng, is a respected business leader with an interest in matters of archaeology. If asked why they were destroying Hartwick's office, they state rather matter-of-factly that, since the professor wasn't here, they'd "have a look around" for information Lee might need. Of course, they're somewhat vague about what it is they were looking for, since -- truth be told -- they don't know why Lee wanted Hartwick.

The end result of this interrogation is that the characters know only that Hartwick isn't in his office and that a Chinese gangster from Shanghai wants to consult with him. Checking with the Warden of the College reveals that Hartwick did not indicate he'd be leaving Merton. As he has lectures this term, it's unlikely he'd disappear willingly. Visiting his home confirms that he is nowhere to be found in Oxford.

Should the characters ask about the symbol on Hartwick's desk, they plead

Fan and Yi

ST: 12 (*Fair*)
DX: 11 (*Fair*)
IQ: 10 (*Mediocre*)
HT: 10 (*Mediocre*)
Speed: 5.5; **Move:** 5
Dodge: 5.

Skills:

Brawling-14 (*Good*)
Guns (Pistol)-16 (*Great*)
Stealth-10 (*Mediocre*)
Streetwise-11 (*Mediocre*)

Body 5 Mind 4 Soul 4

Attributes

Gun Bunny -- 1

Skills

Gun Combat -- 3, Stealth -- 1, Unarmed Attack -- 2

ignorance at first. Upon further questioning they admit it's the symbol of the Black Pinnacle Society, a mysterious group they've tangled with in Shanghai. They suggest that its presence proves that this nefarious band has kidnapped Hartwick.

If the characters do not think of it, Fan and Yi suggest they visit Lee; he may be able to help them. As a fellow "seeker after truth," he shares their interest in scholarly matters such as Egyptology. They even offer to smooth the way between them. Unfortunately, British authorities want to hold the two thugs on charges of breaking and entering, as well as suspicion in the disappearance of Professor Hartwick. Consequently, the characters must make their way to Shanghai -- and Lee Cheng -- alone.

Welcome to Shanghai

Travel to Shanghai will take several days, even by plane. During that time, the characters have ample opportunity to familiarize themselves with the city and its unique circumstances. Information on Lee exists, but is sketchy. According to fragmentary reports, he is a "legitimate businessman" with considerable investments in shipping and overseas trading. He's also associated with the Nationalist movement in a peripheral way, having aided anti-Communist politicians in central China. Lee is also known as a collector of rare Chinese artifacts, especially those from the Han period.

Upon arriving in the city, the characters should find ample lodging in the two Western concession areas. Well-placed bribes and requests for information will reveal that Lee Cheng spends most of his time in the International Settlement's newly built Cathay Hotel (in the Sassoon House). The hotel boasts a fine nightclub with a dance floor and live music (including jazz). Getting a room in the hotel itself will be difficult, unless the characters have lots of influence or resources. However, staying at the Cathay Hotel isn't necessary to enter the nightclub.

The Nightclub

The hotel's nightclub is a fancy affair and the characters are expected to dress accordingly. Its clientele is largely British and American businessmen, but there are plenty of native Chinese present as well, including Lee. Dressed in an immaculate tuxedo, the gangster has a private booth close to the dance floor. Surrounded by a half-dozen burly thugs, he is attended by two young women, both Westerners -- a sign of his affluence.

Approaching Lee will be difficult, as he's as paranoid as he is wealthy. However, there are numerous ways to attract his attention. Chief among them is dancing or otherwise flirting with either of his two female companions, both of whom occasionally leave his side to get him drinks from the bar. Lee is protective of these young women and will immediately send a couple of his goons to bring any characters to his table who dare interfere with them. Another possibility is ordering a round of drinks for Lee's table, a gesture that will likewise draw his attention. The GM should reward player creativity in this area, as there is no single way to get the characters invited to Lee's table.

Kingpin of Crime

How Lee reacts upon first meeting the characters depends on the circumstances that brings them to his table. Even under the best of circumstances, they are frisked for weapons and shadowed by a thug. Lee speaks English with a polished British accent and displays impeccable manners. He offers the characters drinks and food (even if they've offended him by flirting with his companions) and assures them they are not poisoned. He then gets down to business and interrogates them as to their business with him.

If told about Fan and Yi, Lee laughs at the incompetence of his minions. He readily admits that he sought Professor Hartwick's advice on a matter of scholarly importance and regrets he sent two bumblers to collect him. Unfortunately, affairs in Shanghai required his presence here. If asked about his reasons for consulting with Hartwick, Lee will be reluctant to reveal them at first. The characters must work to convince him. Most arguments are ineffective, but Lee will react well if the characters admit their own reasons for seeking the professor. Upon hearing of the key with

Egyptian hieroglyphics, the mobster's eyes will widen and he will relax noticeably.

Lee then leans over and whispers to the characters, revealing that he has come into possession of a most unusual funerary urn. Lee says he is a collector of Chinese antiquities -- the older the better. This urn he now possesses is doubly unusual. For one, its pictographic exterior strangely melds archaic Chinese script with something else, something that looks like Egyptian hieroglyphics. Stranger still, its contents are not the ashes of a deceased nobleman at all, but a reddish crystalline powder. Lee hoped Professor Hartwick might be able to determine of the odd markings are indeed hieroglyphs and, if they are, translate them for him. Unfortunately, someone else seems to be interested in Hartwick as well.

The Enemy of My Enemy

Lee says he suspects Hartwick has been abducted by the Black Pinnacle Society, a secretive and powerful group that has recently arisen in Shanghai. According to him, the Society has been raiding archaeological sites throughout China, frequently coming to blows with his contacts and underlings. The Society is incredibly well funded and informed. If they've come across an artifact like the urn he's acquired, they certainly would have sought out -- and possibly kidnapped -- Professor Hartwick. If so, he may be in grave danger. If told about the symbol carved in Hartwick's desk, Lee will curse in Wu (the Chinese dialect spoken in Shanghai), saying that the Black Pinnacle Society has once again beaten him.

By now, the characters should realize Lee is indeed ruthless but honorable in his own warped way. His interest in archaeology and his consternation at being bested by the mysterious Black Pinnacle Society present an opening for them. If asked, Lee is willing to work with the characters to unravel this mystery and -- it is hoped -- find Hartwick. He will even offer to show the characters the unusual urn, hoping they might be able to shed some light on the matter. Lee then leaves the nightclub, ushering the characters into his waiting limousine.

The limousine takes the characters to Lee's neoclassical home on the banks of the Whampoo river. The mansion is most impressive and speaks volumes about the gangster's wealth and influence in Shanghai. As one might expect, the mansion is well guarded by armed Chinese mobsters. Its interior is beautiful, a testament to Lee's taste -- as well as his ill-gotten gains. Western artwork is interspersed between exquisite Chinese vases, porcelain and other objets d'art.

Lee leads the characters into his large study (whose walls are lined with books). There he shows them the urn that caused him to seek out Professor Hartwick in the first place. One glance at the urn and it's obvious that the hieroglyphs that mark its exterior are similar -- almost identical -- to those on the key found in Kensington, Minnesota. Lee wonders what the connection could be, given the great distance in time and space between these two artifacts, never mind culture. What is the connection?

The urn holds a reddish crystalline powder that scintillates in the light. Characters with skills in geology or chemistry will recognize it is as finely ground gemstones, possibly rubies. Lee finds this revelation amazing, as he cannot fathom why anyone would grind such valuable gems into powder and then place it within an urn.

Men in Black

While Lee and the characters debate the meaning of these discoveries, they are startled by the sound of gunfire from the mansion's foyer. In a matter of seconds, three men -- Westerners -- wearing dark clothing and carrying machine guns enter the study, spraying the area with bullets. Lee ducks behind his large oak desk and urges the characters to do the same. These men are agents of the Black Pinnacle Society, who fought their way in to Lee's mansion to eliminate him -- and the characters!

The combat in the study should be tense and cinematic. Lee keeps many art objects and bookcases in the room. Consequently, there are ample things to use for cover.

Black Pinnacle Hit Men

ST: 10 (*Mediocre*)

DX: 11 (*Mediocre*)

IQ: 9 (*Mediocre*)

HT: 11 (*Mediocre*)

Speed: 5.5; Move: 5

As the hit men blanket the room with leaden death, vases shatter and books fall. The room quickly turns into a chaotic mess. The GM should make every effort to emphasize the characters' dire situation, as well as the unpredictability of the situation.

The hit men are well trained and relentless. Defeating them requires considerable skill and ingenuity on the part of the characters. As always, the GM should reward innovative thinking in the pulp idiom. The study contains several cubbyholes, as well as a chandelier and a wheeled ladder. All of these facts can be used to the characters' advantage with a little thought. In any event, the hit men will fight to the death rather than be captured. All wear the symbol of the Black Pinnacle Society somewhere on their person.

More interestingly, all the hit men look identical. That is, they appear to be identical twins (or in this case triplets). Anyone skilled in medicine can examine their bodies afterwards to confirm this. There is no evidence the hit men have been surgically altered or otherwise changed. As far as anyone can tell, they are indeed perfect copies of one another. If asked, Lee reveals the Black Pinnacle Society seems to have a preference for using twins and triplets. He and his men have encountered this enigma before.

In the course of the fight, the funerary urn is broken in four pieces, spilling the red powder onto the floor, which again refracts any light it catches. Looking at the broken pieces, a strange pattern emerges. The inside of the shards are marked with a fine etching. Characters familiar with Chinese geography quickly recognize what looks to be a crude map. Lee (who survives the shootout) hadn't noticed the map before because he had been extremely careful in examining the urn. In being shattered, the powder filled the etching marks and highlighted the map within -- something no one would have seen before.

The Map

The map within the urn is difficult to interpret at first. With effort, some details become apparent, chief among them being the course of a river, probably the Yangtze. There is also a prominent mountain range in the map. Using the river as a rough guide, Lee suggests it may be the Chiushan Range to the north, in the surrounding Ansu province. The range has profound religious significance for the Chinese people and has been a site of pilgrimage for over two thousand years.

The mountain range seems to have special prominence on the map, as its location is marked with two unusual characters. The ideograms looks vaguely like the Chinese symbols for "excited," "light," and "three thousand three hundred and thirty-three" but they're not precisely enough like modern Chinese to be certain. Like all the other symbols the characters have seen, they show certain similarities with archaic Egyptian hieroglyphs. Nevertheless, the prospect of the Black Pinnacle Society's having a map of their own (a likelihood considering their acquisition of similar funerary urns) suggests the characters should act quickly. Lee concurs and offers them the use of his private plane to speed them on their way to the Chiushan Range.

Mt. Chiu

The journey to the Chiushan Range is a simple matter, but the GM should take the time to emphasize the natural beauty of the area. Not only will this add to the

Dodge: 5.

Advantages:
Toughness (DR1)

Skills:
Brawling-12 (**Fair**)
Guns (Machine Gun)-12
(**Fair**)
Stealth-10 (**Mediocre**)

Body 4 Mind
3 Soul 4

Skills
Gun Combat -- 2, Unarmed
Attack -- 2, Unarmed
Defense -- 1

What's the Story. . .

. . . behind the identical men in black? Basically, whatever the GM wants. This element of the plot is left unexplained, leaving it to the wishes of the GM and the needs of his game. If he wants to play up the "mysterious East" element of the scenario, they can be the result of feeding rare herbs to women to produce twins and triplets. If he wants to emphasize weird science, they can be clones created before DNA is discovered. For occult horror versions of the adventure, more unpleasant explanations abound.

Reality Check

Let's be clear about a few

exotic flavor of the scenario, it sets up the dichotomy between the site in which the story's climax takes place and the events of that climax - always a useful tool in pulp adventures.

Lee recommends the characters visit Chiu'an, a sleepy city at the base of Mt. Chiu. Here, Chinese emperors sometimes came to offer sacrifices to Earth and Heaven. The summit of the mountain can be reached by climbing over 7000 steep stone steps placed by human labor. There are ancient cypress trees, beautifully carved memorial arches, temples and breathtaking views of forests and crags. Once again, the exotic and ancient nature of the locale should be emphasized. Visiting Chiu'an is something the characters should remember for years to come.

In the city, the characters may look for signs of the Black Pinnacle Society. Most locals will not admit to seeing such people in their city, but their reluctance to speak with the characters should reveal that they are lying. Other than repeatedly saying, "no one like that is in the town," the locals offer no help to the characters. Even Lee has no ability to gain additional information. However, he will offer to use his goons to interrogate the locals, but upstanding citizens like characters should reject such methods.

If the characters are persistent (and keep Lee at bay), they'll eventually encounter an old woman named Chin Lizhen. Chin admits to seeing several Westerners in Chiu'an very recently. She says most of them "looked alike," but one was "different." Describing him, the characters realize she's seen Professor Hartwick with what were probably members of the Black Pinnacle Society. Chin adds that the group of men was headed toward Mt. Chiu, although she doubts they were either tourists or pilgrims.

Up the Stairs and Into Trouble

Mt. Chiu has over 7000 stairs carved from its face by unknown hands in the ancient past. They are used to reach its summit, where religious rituals and meditation take place. Having seen the map's reference to 3333, the characters probably suspect they must reach the equivalent stair to proceed. That assumption is indeed correct, as that stair is located at a small ledge on the mountain face, one with an unusual overhang. The overhang conceals a small cave into which a human being can enter -- if he is dexterous enough to jump into it successfully.

While this isn't a problem for the characters or the Black Pinnacle men, aged Professor Hartwick is in no condition to perform such a feat. By the time the characters reach the ledge with the 3333rd stair, they'll encounter four Black Pinnacle agents (all of them identical in appearance) attempting to set up a makeshift winch that will allow them to get Hartwick into the cave safely. When they see the characters, drop what they're doing and draw their revolvers. One of them grabs Hartwick and uses him as a human shield.

Fighting on the stairs is a wonderfully cinematic opportunity for the GM. The locale is inherently limited and offers almost no cover. In addition, the threat of falling -- either down the stairs or off the mountain -- presents many challenges as well. The GM should take full advantage of the environment.

Professor Hartwick's precarious situation must also be dealt with. The Black Pinnacle men have no compunction about threatening the old man's life to give them an advantage. However, they won't actually harm him, since they've been instructed by their master to bring him to Mt. Chiu alive. Characters skilled in psychology should be able to ascertain this fact and use it to their own advantage. Nevertheless, the GM should play the scene as a standoff, with the Black Pinnacle men doing their best to find a way to eliminate the characters without allowing Hartwick to come to permanent harm. In the end, though, they'll die trying to stop the characters from saving Hartwick and entering the mysterious cave.

things: there is no Chiushan Range or city of Chiu'an. They're fictitious creations that further the plot of this adventure and are in keeping with its pulp character. After all, the events of this adventure are clearly unreal. Why shouldn't the geography be too?

If you're a stickler for accuracy (or have a post-graduate degree in Chinese geography), feel free to change the locale to an actual site in China. The adventure is flexible enough that this shouldn't be a problem. The important thing is that this scenario be enjoyable. If a fictitious mountain range or town gets in the way of that enjoyment, be all means change them to suit your group.

Hartwick's Revelation

Once freed, Hartwick thanks the characters and explains that he's been shuttled around China to examine a variety of odd artifacts. He says that all are ancient Chinese in origin, but many (though not all) show peculiar affinities with similar artifacts from Egypt. In fact, there are weird commonalities in both the style and symbology that suggest they may have a common origin!

Hartwick realizes this is implausible, but he cannot deny what he's seen with his own eyes. More ominously, these Black Pinnacle people (all of whom seem to be twins or triplets or . . .) seem to believe that these artifacts hold the key to something bigger still, although they never made it quite clear what. Hartwick believes they're seeking some sort of power source or even a weapon with which to advance their nefarious plans.

The answer may lie within the cave.

The Cave

Professor Hartwick will not enter the cave. Lee will see that he's taken back to safety in Chiu'an. Entering the cave requires the characters to use the overhang to swing into the opening. If successful, they find that the "cave" is actually a regularly carved passageway that descends into the depths of the mountain. The smoothness of the passageway suggests a technology that no one in ancient China was known to possess. Likewise, the characters find themselves growing warmer as they descend deeper into the mountain.

After some distance, the passageway widens and opens up into a chamber with a high ceiling. The room glitters with coruscating red light that's almost blinding at first. The light originates in a strange glowing device at the center of the chamber, reflected throughout hundreds -- perhaps thousands - of red gems that line its walls and floor. Standing beside the device is a tall, thin man, surrounded by five more Black Pinnacle men.

Unless the characters alert the chamber's occupants of their presence, they can observe them in safety. The tall, thin man is clearly their leader and (in the pulp tradition) explains his plan to his henchmen. He says, in an obviously American accent, "We only need the professor to verify the translation of this last part and we'll have completed this weapon for our master. Then, the world will know the might of the Black Pinnacle Society!" He then laughs heartily, joined by his five identical henchmen.

What Now?

The characters must now decide how to deal with the Black Pinnacle Society. Whatever the device, it is clearly a weapon of some sort, one that uses light and gems to power it. No matter the cost, they must be stopped.

The five henchmen use revolvers to fight, while the leader has an automatic pistol. If confronted, they will attack with great ferocity, doing their best both to defeat the characters and prevent the device from being damaged. They react similarly to taunting or other attempts to speak with them. They use the usual bag of villainous tricks to convince the characters to surrender before to the Black Pinnacle Society. If told of Professor Hartwick's escape, the leader grows angrier and orders his men to attack.

Black Pinnacle Leader

ST: 10 (*Mediocre*)
DX: 12 (*Fair*)
IQ: 16 (*Great*)
HT: 10 (*Mediocre*)
Speed: 5.5; **Move:** 5
Dodge: 5.

Advantages:

Intuition
Strong Will +1
Very Wealthy

Disadvantages:

Megalomania
Overconfidence

Skills:

Fast Talk-14 (*Good*)
Guns (Pistol)-12 (*Fair*)
Leadership-16 (*Great*)
Savior-Faire-14 (*Good*)
Tactics-14 (*Good*)

Body 5 Mind 9 Soul
7

Attributes

Aura of Command

Defects

Once the fight begins to turn against the henchmen, their leader activates the device and aims it at the characters. It is a primitive laser weapon. However, it has been constructed poorly (based on a mistranslation of the passage they needed Hartwick for) and will explode rather than operate properly. Thus, the climax of this scene may well be the weapon's destruction at the hands of its operator -- resulting in his death as well.

Aftermath

Once defeated, the characters can examine the bodies of their fallen enemies. Other than the oddity of so many identical henchmen (except their leader), they find only one clue of interest. As Lee had suggested, the group had pieced together more of the weird Chinese/Egyptian symbology from various artifacts. Looking over the fragments they brought with them, it's clear they include not only a map to Mt. Chiu, but also the plans for a powerful energy weapon -- one that amplifies the Earth's own telluric energies through rubies and other gemstones. Professor Hartwick can confirm this with some difficulty (the symbols are neither truly Egyptian nor truly Chinese), although he continues to doubt the authenticity of what he is reading.

Should the characters check into the matter of the leader's identity, they can confirm that he is Stockton Van Dyke, a prominent New York financier with business interests throughout the world, including China. In recent years, Van Dyke has grown increasingly reclusive and inaccessible. He has left the running of his vast enterprise to his son, Arthur.

Finally, the characters now have a contact in Shanghai. Lee Cheng could thus recur in future adventure as the morally dubious but helpful crime boss that aids the characters when they need something done in the Orient.

Epilogue

The conclusion to this adventure saves Professor Hartwick and foils the development of an energy weapon by the mysterious Black Pinnacle Society, but it doesn't resolve everything. The "Steps of Chiushan" can be followed up in numerous ways, including:

- Why was Van Dyke involved in this weird conspiracy?
- What is the mystery of the identical henchmen?
- What is the origin of the weird symbols that combine both Chinese and Egyptian symbology and yet predate both great civilizations?

For the answers to these and other questions, tune in next month for the next installment of Around the World in 80 Thrills.

Links

- Merton College, University of Oxford -- <http://www.merton.ox.ac.uk/>
- Shanghai Map (circa 1933) -- http://www.lib.utexas.edu/Libs/PCL/Map_collection/historical/Shanghai_1933.jpg

Unique Character Defects:
Megalomaniac,
Overconfident

Skills

Gun Combat -- 2,
Intimidation -- 3, Military
Sciences (Tactics) -- 3

The Energy Weapon

Like the identical men in black, the energy weapon can be dressed up in varying degrees of chrome to suit the needs of the GM. The scenario as written assumes it is a conventional -- if ancient -- weapon of a science fictional sort. Its origin is all that sets it apart from space opera blasters. However, the GM is perfectly within his rights to make it something more sinister or scientific. The pulp genre is a broad one and runs the gamut from hardboiled detectives to globetrotting investigators of the occult. Thus, the weapon could as easily be a soul-sucking engine as a laser beam. Use whatever is best for your own game.

Pyramid Review

Adventure Boosters #9-12 (for d20)

Published by [Alderac Entertainment Group](#)



The Last Gods, written by Kevin Wilson
Bring Him Back Alive!, written by Matt Forbeck

The Heart of Amun Khonshu, written by Marcelo and Kat Figueroa
The Murder of the Seven Points, written by Erik Yaple

16 half-size black and white pages; \$2.49 each

Alderac's *Adventure Boosters* aren't the best adventures ever, but they're arguably the best value in roleplaying. There are three hits and one miss in the latest batch, and you can't beat two and a half bucks for an evening's entertainment. At the same time, there are limits to what a writer can do with a sixteen-page pamphlet. The three successful adventures work because they present a very limited situation with style, and the failure -- *The Murder of the Seven Points* -- collapses because it doesn't have enough space to do its plot justice.

There's a good spread of difficulty among the four adventures. *Bring Him Back Alive* is for 1st through 4th level *d20* characters, and *The Murder of the Seven Points* is intended for levels 5 through 8. The last two adventures aim a little higher, at 8th to 12th level. It's not hard to find an *Adventure Booster* that will fit your current *D&D* group.

Each booklet in the series follows roughly the same structure: a central map keyed to a series of encounters, with a new monster and a new magic item profiled at the end. Once you're familiar with the format, it's easy to pick one up, give it a quick read, and be ready to run in a half hour or less.

(SPOILER ALERT)

The Last Gods is probably the best of the four. It's a classic self-contained adventure, with a premise that can be dropped into any game on a moment's notice. One night, a god named Azrael appears before the PCs with a terrible story. After stealing an ancient and powerful artifact, he has destroyed the universe. Now, facing the end of everything, he feels remorse, and has traveled back in time to stop himself. He needs the heroes to prevent him from stealing the artifact.

High stakes. With a wave of the narrative hand, the characters are brought to the Mausoleum of the Gods, the place where the gods themselves go to die. It's up to the PCs to get into the heart of the temple, find Azrael, and stop him before he gains the power to be a very bad boy.

There are some monsters lurking around, but *The Last Gods* is a puzzle adventure. Due to the unusual magicks of the Mausoleum, the monsters are a little less powerful than normal . . . though the final battle with Azrael more than makes up for this. As for the puzzles, they're quite dangerous. This is not a *Tomb of Horrors*, but a poorly prepared or thoughtless party is going to get mangled.

All the puzzles are fair, and they usually reward investigation and lateral thinking. (By the way, one puzzle works especially well if the gamemaster prepares some props.) Several of the later puzzles are "tests of character," though,

and those can fall flat unless the GM handles them very carefully. What should be an epic journey -- following in the footsteps of the gods themselves -- can easily turn preachy and dull during these scenes.

What makes *The Last Gods* good, though, is that it supplies all the incidents the GM needs to create a single-session epic. The whole universe is at stake, after all, and it's not every day you get to take on a god. In the wrong hands, the adventure is an arbitrary puzzle fest. Done right, it's a mythic tale of heroism and sacrifice that the players will talk about for months. Everything depends on the GM's own ability to describe the action and set the mood.

The Heart of Amun Khonshu doesn't have the same epic scope, but it's a well-themed raid of an evil pseudo-Egyptian sorcerer's tomb. Another powerful artifact is at stake -- an Elven ranger needs the heart of the title to heal a suffering friend -- but the PC's main interest is to sack the tomb and clean out the treasure.

There's more fighting in this adventure, but what the players will remember is a selection of vicious traps. Most of them are of the "stick your hand or head into the room and nearly get it blown off" variety, which should get the players twitching fairly quickly. It's a good thing this is a short adventure -- a few traps like these go a long way -- but there are few enough here that the players are on to the final confrontation before they get sick of being blasted and poisoned.

This is also a good adventure for reminding your players of what unpleasant work adventuring can be. This tomb doesn't have lights or doors -- the PCs have to dig out the bricked-in masonry -- and a few choice descriptions of how dirty and hot the characters are getting as they dig through the tomb will remind the players that dungeon delving isn't just strolling down ten-foot-wide corridors.

Bring Him Back Alive! is less interesting, but it's still a respectable low-level adventure. Tiny people have kidnapped a merchant's son, and the characters have to retrieve him. Standard stuff, but the plot can be resolved in several different ways. Even the seemingly obligatory dire rats and spiders -- can you have a low-level adventure without them any more? -- present a surprise or two.

Then there's *The Murder of the Seven Points*. This one features another standard plot -- a hunt for a ritual murderer -- but presents it very poorly.

There are two good approaches to a mystery adventure. You can dig into characters, provide enticing red herrings and clues, and give the players a fair chance to solve the mystery through deduction and intuition. Or you can run the story like an action movie as the characters chase an obvious villain through exciting situations. *The Murder of the Seven Points* does neither.

There are almost no clues by which the characters can deduce the villain's identity, and his motivations are completely unexplained, even to the GM. There isn't much of a chase after the villain either, since the characters almost never encounter him. Instead, they are led by an NPC from point to point in the city. There's also an unimaginative red herring and a lot of waiting around for something to happen. Worse, the adventure ends in anti-climax if the PCs *do* guess who the murderer is before the big fight at the end.

The Murder of the Seven Points could have been an interesting mystery, but probably not in this format. There simply isn't enough room in these short adventures for the complicated clues and interconnecting motivations that keep players guessing. It's too bad, though, that Alderac didn't even get a good action story out of this adventure.

(END SPOILER ALERT)

Three out of four isn't bad, but the failure of the fourth points out a fundamental limitation of the short adventure. You can do a lot in sixteen pages, but you can't do it in detail. Dungeons have to be small, descriptions have to be brief, and the story has to be simple. Dungeon crawls work well, but you can't do much else.

Fortunately, *D&D* always has room for another good dungeon crawl. Hopefully Alderac has plenty more on the way.

-- Chris Aylott

Pyramid Review

Pyramid Review: Shipwrecked Card Game

Shipwrecked Card Game

Published by [Out of the Box](#)



Designed by **Matthew Kirby and Mark Alan Osterhaus**

Illustrated by **John Kovalic**

24 Bid cards, 24 Resource cards, 65 gemstones, rulebook; \$15.95

Two to four castaways are stuck on a deserted island and must compete with each other for food, shelter, water, and friends in this new bidding game from Out of the Box Games. In the tradition of their previous games, *Apples to Apples* and *Bosworth*, *Shipwrecked* is simple, fun, and hysterically illustrated by John Kovalic.

Kovalic provides a unique illustration for twenty Resource cards. The Resources are divided into the four types mentioned above and are ranked from ten to 50 Points each. The first Crusoe to win 100 Points worth of cards of a single type of Resource, or to win 150 Points worth of cards of any type, wins the game. Each Resource also has an Income number that gives players gemstones, the local currency, at the beginning of their turns. Finally, they have a Value number players can use to sell the card to the bank for a quick cash infusion. As the Points of the cards increase, the Income decreases, so a player lagging behind in Points receives more help from the bank each turn.

Players win Resource cards by bidding on them. On each turn, a player reveals the top Resource card and begins a six round bidding session. The price of the Resource cards begins at five gemstones for the first round and it decreases every round until a player wins the Resource. This system makes it possible, but highly unlikely, that a castaway could win the card for free.

Players do not bid with their gemstones, however. They bid with one of six Bid cards, played face down each round. Each player has two Stop cards, three Pass cards, and one Strike card. If a castaway is the only one to play a Stop card during a bidding round, that player wins the Resource and pays the bank the appropriate amount. A Strike card trumps a Stop card. Two or more Strikes in a single round, however, cancel each other. The Pass card simply allows the bidding to advance in hopes of winning the Resource at a later -- and cheaper -- bidding round. In a final bit of strategy, playing a Stop card does not necessarily stop the bidding. A player must announce that she is stopping the bidding. This allows players a last minute change of heart should they suspect a Strike has been played.

Players can tie during a bidding round if two or more play Stop cards at the same time. Ties are broken by the number of Pass bids played during previous bidding rounds for this card. The Resource goes to the player with the most Passes. If a tie remains, then the tied players pay for the Resource and must begin a new bidding session with just those players involved. This is an expensive outcome, and if a player can not pay for a Resource card, then he is bankrupt and out of the game.

The fun of *Shipwrecked* is trying to out-guess your opponents. Players must decide how much each of their rivals are willing to pay for a Resource, what their bidding strategy will be, and how to win while avoiding a dreaded tie.

Shipwrecked is not a revolution in bidding games, but it is quick, easy to learn, and fun. And John Kovalic's illustrations are a riot; the picture of the monkey sitting atop a disgruntled castaway's head is almost worth the price tag alone.

-- *Brad Weier*

Murphy's Rules



by John Kovalic

Murphy's Rules



Murphy's Rules



Dork Tower!



Dork Tower!



Enoch, Enoch, Who's There?

"And Enoch lived sixty and five years, and begat Methuselah. And Enoch walked with God after he begat Methuselah three hundred years, and begat sons and daughters. And all the days of Enoch were three hundred sixty and five years. And Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him."

-- Genesis 5:21-24

It's either the first ever alien abduction on record or the record of the ancient astronauts. It's either a book of antediluvian wisdom, or a dangerous work of lurking heresy. It's a warning, and a dream, and a prophecy, and an apocalypse. It's a surprisingly influential book, considering it was completely lost (or . . . *hidden*) for over a millennium. It's the *Book of Enoch*, and it's the original old-school Book Of Hidden Lore. Let's open it up.

"This is the book of the words of righteousness, and of the reproof of the Watchers, who are eternally present, according to that which He who is holy and great commanded in the vision. I perceived in my dream that I was now speaking in a tongue of flesh, and with my breath, which the Mighty One has put into the mouth of men, that they might converse with it."

-- Enoch 14:1

The *Book of Enoch* is both a compilation of perhaps five of the books and a portion (or summary) of the older *Book of Noah*, which remains lost. The first 36 chapters, comprising the "Book of the Watchers," expand on the story of the "sons of god and the daughters of men" from Genesis 6:2-4, and discuss the fallen angels and their fate. The second section, of 34 chapters, is a collection of visionary "parables." In the ten succeeding "Astronomical" chapters, Enoch travels to heaven and has the working of the skies revealed to him; the next 8 chapters are divinatory dream visions, followed by stern moral advice in the final 15-chapter "Epistle of Enoch" section. (Chapter numbering in the *Book of Enoch* is unstandardized; I'm using the Richard Laurence translation, available at

<http://www.bible2000.org/lostbooks/enoch1.htm>.)

The oldest known versions of the Book of Watchers and the Astronomy date to the early 3rd century B.C., and most scholars date the Parables to the first century B.C. or A.D. The rest of the book dates from between these eras, although the "Apocalypse of Weeks" (so called because it divides human history into ten symbolic weeks) in Enoch 92 and the Dreams probably date from the Maccabean Era (ca. 165 B.C.) since they refer to those events in some detail. The [Dead Sea Scrolls](#) contain fragments of the *Book of Enoch*, although nothing from the Parables, and it became a key part of both early Christian and revolutionary Jewish mysticism. The New Testament Book of Jude even approvingly quotes Enoch 2:1, and other New Testament epistles (including Paul in Corinthians) refer to its concepts, indicating that it was considered valuable, even divine, by the early Church. Although Origen and Clement both considered it canonical, St. Augustine disagreed, saying "their [the Books of Enoch] antiquity brought them under suspicion" -- especially because of all that foolishness with giants and angels and their evil spawn wreaking havoc over the earth and people traveling bodily to heaven and coming back.

*"Enmeduranki was a prince in Sippar, beloved of Anu, Enlil and Ea.
Shamash in the Bright Temple appointed him as priest.
Shamash and Adad took him to the assembly of the gods [in heaven]
They showed him how to observe oil on water, a secret of Anu, Enlil and Ea.
They gave him the Divine Tablet, the kibdu secret of Heaven and Earth....
They taught him how to make calculations with numbers."*

-- Sumerian Tablet of Enmeduranki

And it probably wouldn't have made Augie feel any better to know that Enoch is a close parallel to the Sumerian hero-king Enmeduranki of Sippar, who also traveled into the seven heavens and learned all wisdom from the gods. In addition to the names ("anki" and "Enoch" are cognate, it seems), Enmeduranki is the seventh god-king of Sumer just as Enoch is the seventh patriarch from Adam, both have a strong connection to the solar calendar (Enoch's Biblical "365 years" contrasts with the traditional lunar calendar of, say, the Jews and Babylonians), and they both founded prophetic lineages. Enoch/Enmeduranki has also been identified with the Assyrian Utu-Abzu, who did the same thing,

and the word Abzu is also the "subterranean fresh water ocean" of the Sumerian god Enki -- and we're back to Enoch again. One source identifies Enoch with the Titan Atlas, which brings in the giants and the "from Earth to Heaven" motif; and the Alexandrian Greeks (who wrote the *Book of the Secrets of Enoch*, also known as 2 Enoch, in around 60 A.D.) identified him with Thoth and Hermes, creators of writing and magic.

"My brother, I see thou dost not understand the mystery of this Book, or work thou hast in hand. But I told thee, it was the knowledge God delivered unto Enoch."

-- angelic message to John Dee, Jul 7 1584

Which is why John Dee was so excited when the angels started giving him the long-lost *Book of Enoch* in 1584, in their language, "Enochian." Sadly, Dee's *Book of Enoch* is not the same as our *Book of Enoch*, consisting primarily of gibberish and angelic summoning tables. (Dee's "Enochian" alphabet differed, as well, from the one printed in 1530 by the alchemist Pantheus in his *Vorarchadumia*, although Dee read and annotated it.) 320 years later, Aleister Crowley also received an "Enochian" book, the *Book of the Law*, which also isn't the *Book of Enoch*. However, since Enoch wrote 366 books after his return from heaven (says 2 Enoch 23:3), maybe John Dee and Aleister Crowley each got one of the even more thoroughly lost books. Perhaps every one of the various magical, lost books from the eldritch *Necronomicon* to the enigmatic [Voynich Manuscript](#) to the saucerian *Book of Urantia* are part of Enoch's spiritual lending library.

"Enoch is by some identified with Hermes, the Hellenic Mercury, and the Egyptian Thoth. To him were attributed certain learned books; by him also the brazen and stone pillars connected with the learning of the ancient world were erected . . . But the whole doctrine respecting Enoch is involved in mystery . . . It may be well to add to this article a few words about the Abyssinian Book of Enoch. This book was known to exist from very ancient times, and is continually alluded to by the fathers of the Church. Bruce brought home three copies from Abyssinia . . ."

-- Kenneth Mackenzie, *The Royal Masonic Cyclopaedia*

Enoch (busy guy) also carved all knowledge into two pillars, variously described as brass and stone, or by Josephus as brick and stone, to survive the coming Apocalypse -- either the Flood or the next one. (The stone pillar is the flood-proof one; the brick or brass pillar is the fireproof one.) These two pillars find echoes in Masonic lore as the twin pillars of Jachin and Boaz, before the Temple of Solomon. And, in my mind, as the Pillars of Heracles, which connects us back to the Giant Atlas -- and to Heracles' incarnation as Ogmios, the hero-king who taught the Druids "ogham" writing and ascended into heaven. Be that as it may, Freemason and antiquary James Bruce (a member of the Kilwinning Lodge of Scottish Freemasonry -- which contains the Arch of Enoch degree), ostensibly to discover the source of the Blue Nile, ventured into Ethiopia in 1768, emerging five years later with not one but three copies of the "Ethiopic" *Book of Enoch*, a close translation of the full Greek text into Ge'ez. Finally, the lost book was found, and in 1821 Bishop Richard Laurence of Cashel produced the first English translation of Enoch's antediluvian wisdom.

"I saw the key-holders and guards of the gates of hell standing, like great serpents, and their faces like extinguishing lamps, and their eyes of fire, their sharp teeth, and I saw all the Lord's works, how they are right, while the works of man are some good, and others bad, and in their works are known those who lie evilly."

-- 2 Enoch 42:1

It has taken more than 150 years for the implications to begin echoing through Biblical studies. The foremost expert on the *Book of Enoch*, J.T. Milik, has demonstrated that Augustine was wrong -- Genesis 6:2-4 it turns out, is the summary of the older story contained in full in the *Book of Enoch*. Thus, if you buy Genesis, you get Nephilim, and the evil "sons of God," known as the Watchers, or Grigori. The *Book of Enoch* goes into much explicit detail about Semjaza, the leader of the Grigori, and how he and the other Grigori taught men all useful and impious arts, from sorcery to war to astronomy to cosmetics. This, of course, is where we join the [ancient astronauts](#), already in progress. You can tie the Grigori and Nephilim to the giants (duh), to the winged [ultraterrestrials](#) (angels have wings in Enoch, or at least feathers), to the Nordics ("his body was white as snow and red as a rose, and his hair was white as wool, and beautiful, and when he opened his eyes, the house glowed like the sun . . ."), and to the Reptoids. One of the Watchers, Gadrel, is revealed as the (serpentine) tempter of Eve in Enoch 68:7. Those who find Enochian parallels elsewhere in Scripture note John the Baptist's use of the "generation of vipers" (Luke 3:7) as a sign of the coming apocalypse. Enoch, it transpires, was the eyewitness to a War in Heaven and an apocalypse on Earth -- and then,

having written down his wisdom and hidden it (From the Watchers? From the angels?) he "walked with God, and he was not, for God took him." Or the Reptoids did.

Anniversaries

In the week that this issue is new, we will pass the third anniversary of the online version of *Pyramid*. Last month I had the one-year anniversary of my editorship of *Pyramid*. And next month is my parents' anniversary, and it has been hinted that there will be Dire Consequences if I forget it again. So anniversaries have been on my mind lately.

I'm definitely glad the magazine has survived when it seems just about everything else internet-related has fallen into the sea; thanks to you all of you readers for making this possible. And hopefully we'll survive another three years, when *Pyramid* is scheduled to be replaced with a holodeck virtual reality gaming experience (no doubt coming out at the same time as the flying cars they kept promising us).

For whatever reason we humans have a fascination with anniversaries. We like to be able to say that it's been ten years since the as-yet-unsolved Fooble Murder, or a hundred years since the birth of Merle the Mystic. I suspect it's because we like to compartmentalize our lives, in order to keep everything from merging together into this one amorphous event (much like the 90's are currently trying to do in my mind).

Regardless, it's also one of the interesting things I like to do in gaming. If you have someone in the group who's the timekeeper (a topic I'll expand upon in a few weeks), or a game world with a lot of history and dates (like anything involving Time Travel, or richly detailed worlds like *Aberrant*), you can use anniversaries to your advantage. It can be very powerful to realize that, in the middle of an adventure, some *previous* adventure is having its anniversary . . . perhaps with the resultant memories media coverage. Anniversaries are a very easy way to provide continuity and cohesion to a campaign that may otherwise struggle to be episodic. For example, the *In Nomine* adventure "Feast of Blades" from the *In Nomine GM Screen* takes place around [SPOILER ALERT!] a plane crash near Christmas time [END SPOILER ALERT]. In the campaign where I was a player in the scenario, this incident became a forging incident for our group; as the years went by in the campaign, we would return to that event and its repercussions (and NPCs and dangling plot threads), giving the entire campaign more verisimilitude.

So, presuming your campaigns last more than a year in game time (which I would guess is a problem for many groups), keep track of the dates of those big events, birthdays, and other happenings. Otherwise you'll forget . . .

. . . with Dire Consequences.

* * *

And, speaking of anniversaries, next week is the one-year anniversary of [The Torg Story](#). Let me stress this ahead of time about next week's tale: **it's not my fault!!!** Okay, maybe it is . . .

* * *

I considered my one-year anniversary to be significant. Since everyone subscribes to *Pyramid* for a year at a time, I had no real way of knowing if most people liked what I was doing or not; everyone *could* have subscribed right before I came on board, and been stuck with me for a year. But by this point just about everyone who's still reading has had to resubscribe once. And our numbers are still solid currently, so I'll take that as affirmation that you all still like *Pyramid*. (Whether that is because of or in spite of my involvement I won't presume to know . . .) Regardless, as ever I welcome and encourage your comments, either over in [the discussion boards](#) or via [email](#).

* * *

This week also sees the semi-official departure of our webmaster Keith Johnson. He's going to the GAMA show next week (where, ironically, he'll meet his boss Steve Jackson for the first time -- the joys of telecommuting!). Keith may be around to help with next week's issue (and/or the weeks afterward), but even as I type the Arcane Secrets of the SJ Games website and *Pyramid* are being sliced out of him by corporate ninjas.

With *Pyramid* alone, Keith was responsible for most of the attractive logos at the top of the articles, getting the art in shape (often scanning and/or coloring the art entirely for a week's issue), and jillions of other things behind the scenes. He was also the magical black hole where I got to forward questions like, "I'm trying to access *Pyramid* via my Atari 2600, and it's not working! What do I do?", and the person I emailed in a panic when I realize I had typos in the poll. And he's a generally cool guy to hang out with virtually in the [chat rooms](#) (even if he *did* cheat at my weekly trivia quote for a while . . .).

So let me take this opportunity to thank you, Keith; may your bluebird of happiness always rest upon your windowsill of life . . . or some such. (Can you see why I edit a magazine instead of writing for Hallmark?)

* * *

Gloat Time: Next Thursday I get to go to a They Might Be Giants concert. Yea! I'm so happy.

To tie what would otherwise be a bit of geekgloat into gaming (somewhat), [eMusic.com](#) is offering a free album (or 15 tracks) for folks who register with their site. Check out <http://www.emusic.com/index.html#promoanchor> for more information. They have a fair amount of interesting things, including a lot of neat soundtracks (like *Star Trek* and *Quantum Leap*) that should be of some interest to gamers. But act quickly; the offer expires March 18th.

Of course, you could also use your free tracks to download [They Might Be Giants](#) material . . .

* * *

*Last week's answer: **Doctor Who RPG** (FASA), **A Sourcebook for Field Agents**, p. 50. (The quote in question was referring to a yo-yo, and went on for another two paragraphs. Brilliant technobabble.)*

*(Three stars) "Magical weapons can affect tech targets on a successful attack roll, inflicting 1 point of damage for every '+' of the weapon (thus a *long sword* +2 inflicts 2 hp on a successful strike)."*

Pyramid Review

Diablo II: To Hell And Back

Published by Wizards of the Coast

Written by Jason Carl, David Eckelberry, Jeff Quick, and Rich Redman



192 b & w pages; \$29.95

The *Diablo II* sourcebook *Diablerie* went a long way towards bringing the characters, magic items and monsters of the *Diablo II* game to the 3rd edition *D&D* rules, but was missing some critical elements like Diablo and the adventures of the *Diablo II* computer game. *To Hell and Back* brings those elements to the 3rd edition, but is it enough?

The game starts off with an overview of the Diablo universe's background, with information on the peculiars of the Diablo world. This includes the use of Waypoint Portals, Shrines, Special Areas, and miscellaneous information like Story XP Awards, NPC Hirelings, and monster tactics. Each section is short and to the point.

The four acts The Sightless Eye, The Secret of the Vizjerei, The Infernal Gate, and the Harrowing, follow the computer game closely, but have some variants within them. Each section is mapped out with encounters with the locals. In each act the NPCs are given stats, quotes, and rumors. Those who provide services have information on what type of items and abilities they can provide the party with.

The unique monsters are not segregated, but rather, have stats in abbreviated format. All the end monsters are here, from Andariel, Duriel, and Mephisto to Diablo himself. Even the minor bosses like Blood Raven and Hephasto the Armorer are given stats.

Lastly, there is nothing in the module that requires you own *Diablerie*. Normal characters may have an easier time of it since they have a greater range of abilities than the standard *Diablo II* classes.

Appendix A is the Monster Compendium for all things *Diablo II*. It seems every monster from *Diablo II*, including all those missed by *Diablerie*, are covered here. Baboon Demons, Blunderbores, Cantors, Frog Demons and others can be transplanted to any campaign. At the end of the section is an alphabetized listing of monsters sorted by challenge ratings, which is a quick way to determine what to throw at characters from any setting. Those who want to know what creature goes with what act though should look through Appendix B, the encounter tables. Here, each act is broken down by area with monsters common to that land. One roll of a d20 with the proper chart will tell you what the characters encounter from the Rocky Waste to the Ancient Tunnels.

The last three pages almost seem thrown in as an afterthought. Page 190 is a map of the Diablo II world. It's a nice map, but what's the scale? Outside of the areas in the game, no cities or locals are detailed. Page 191 is a map that can be used as a drawing map with one hex equaling five feet, or as a miniature map with one square equaling five feet. The page is a map key for the computerized Diablo II maps.

Layout is the standard two columns with spoken material boxed in gray background. The art for the area and dungeon maps is similar to previous Diablo II products in that it looks very computer generated. Fortunately, some of the maps are enlarged so that they can be copied and used with standard miniatures.

There are four issues that I have with *To Hell And Back*. The first is the use of old art. Art from the previous *Diablo D&D* products worms its way into this product, and it's annoying. If new art couldn't be commissioned, way make the reader pay for it? They could have at least reduced the size of the book.

The second problem is reuse of monsters covered in *Diablerie*. While not all the monsters are reprinted, most of them from *Diablerie* (like Bat Demon, Bloodhawk, Claw Viper, and Corrupt Rogue) are covered. This would have saved about another fifteen to twenty pages if they had just covered new monsters.

The third problem is the selection of creatures that are detailed. The angels, like Tyrael and Hadriel have no stats. If the authors are going to go through all the trouble of providing stats for the townspeople, why not the same for the angels? The third demon lord, Baal, is also not given stats. Once the players defeat Diablo, there is a paragraph section, "Where to Next?" that suggests they hunt down Baal. Without stats this would be difficult. If they are expecting us to make up stats, then why did we pay for the adventure?

The last problem is a minor one, but the boxed text often comes right from the computer game and should be read carefully before reading. Some characters address the "barbarian" or "paladin." What happens with a new GM whose group doesn't have such a character? The results might be a little humorous; new GMs should read the book first and then adjust the text to your own game.

All in all, as a dungeon crawl, *To Hell And Back* is massive and will take many weeks to complete. Is it anything other than a dungeon crawl? No. Can it be? The world background is brief, but those GMs anxious to carve their own notch in the setting have more material than previously available. If you already own the computer game, the 3rd edition expansion *Diablerie*, and the two boxed sets of miniatures to go with it, *To Hell And Back* is an excellent way to bring the computer game to the RPG. If you're looking for a world book that gives you the *Diablo II* cultures and history, this isn't it.

-- Joe G. Kushner

Better Than Him; Worthy Of You

A Scenario for *Ars Magica*

by Timothy Ferguson

The following is a single-session scenario designed for use with the *Ars Magica* game, but it is easily converted to other fantasy settings.

Forty years ago an elderly puppeteer named Geppetto carved a marionette from an enchanted block of wood. He developed paternal affection for his puppet and, when his wooden son ran away, Geppetto abandoned his workshop to search for him. Geppetto found Pinocchio, who fled from him time after time until, worn down by sickness, fatigue and exposure, Geppetto hovered at the edge of death. Pinocchio changed his ways and nursed his father back to health, then cared for him until his death, twenty years ago. Pinocchio was granted a human body, by the faerie mistress of the forest from whence his wood first came, and so all that was wrong now seemed right.

During his first adventure, Pinocchio was captured by Fire Eater, an evil puppeteer who kept animate marionettes as slaves and firewood. After softening his captor's heart, for just a moment, Pinocchio was set free and he never saw Fire Eater (also called the Director) again. Pinocchio never returned to the hamlet where he was carved, settling down as a basket-weaver, then a rich craftsman, in a distant village by the sea. His father's house, his father's goods, his father's other marionettes, all were forgotten . . .

. . . except, of course, by the Director. He bought the house. He animated the puppets. For the last thirty-nine years, they've been his toys. He's broken almost all of them, all but a scant few who were too inconvenient to replace. One of those was Polendina, a girl marionette designed as a seamstress, who also prepared his meals and tended his house.

When the Director died, his puppets were freed. Freedom, though, isn't useful when you are broken and suffering. Polendina can transplant parts between animate puppets, sewing together the fragments of the broken to repair her siblings. Short of an accident, however, there is no dying puppet to donate all of the parts her family need. That's why she needs to find her brother, the legendary puppet who became a real boy, the one she thinks of as The Liar.

When Pinocchio became a "real boy" he was given a new body, not transformed from wood to flesh. His marionette remained, and he has kept it safe all these years, since it is linked to him sympathetically, like a voodoo doll. Polendina can vivisect the marionette and use the pieces to mend her family. It will kill Pinocchio, but Polendina thinks he's irredeemable.

Characters

Pinocchio Today

Pinocchio, named Paul Collodi after his confirmation, became wealthy in his youth. He was, at first, a skilled basket-weaver, then was given a fortune by the Lady with Azure Hair, the faerie guardian of the grove his wood came from. He's since married Jeanette, the daughter of an older weaver, taking over that family's business.

Paul is technically one of the Fae. The block from which Pinocchio was carved could move and speak before it was carved into a boy. It was animated by a spirit, which Geppetto's Free Expression virtue allowed him to mould into a marionette. Pinocchio was a sort of kobalt (*Faeries Revised Edition*, p. 117) The Lady transformed Pinocchio into a variant of hamadryad, linked to his marionette the way normal dryads are to trees. As an urban faerie, Paul is unharmed by the symbols of divine power, but gains no benefit from miracles.

It's central to Paul's sense of self-worth that he is a "real" person. He does not know that he is a faerie, and will not

accept the idea if someone informs him. Although he knows he is sterile, he doesn't connect this to him being something other than a "real" person. Paul is unaware that Geppetto's other puppets are sapient or mobile.

Faerie Might: 25

Size: 0

Characteristics: Int +1, Per +2, Str +1, Sta +5, Prs +2, Com +0, Dex +3, Qik +3

Powers: Although he has faerie powers, Paul's Delusion makes him unable to use them deliberately. He has the equivalent of the following virtues and flaws.

Virtues and Flaws: Wealthy Merchant +3, Temporal Influence +2, Contortions +1, Perfect Balance +1, Well-Travelled +1, Knack With Swords +3, Faerie Friend +2 (Lady with Azure Hair), Delusion -1 (is human), Enemies -2 (Polendina, possibly the Talking Cricket he murdered), Cursed -4 (sympathetic link to marionette)

As a faerie, Paul is not Faerie Blooded, which is a virtue for mortals with faerie ancestors. He has Faerie Sight, but doesn't realise it. He just thinks he's very perceptive.

Traits: as the GM sees fit.

Skills: as appropriate for class and lifestyle, along with high scores in Carouse (dancing), Juggling (acrobatics) and Single Weapon (sword), from his initial design.

Polendina

Polendina is a female marionette about two feet in height. She has blonde hair (worn in pigtails) and freckles. Her eyes are wide and brown and look like a baby's. Those who know Paul can discern a family resemblance in Polendina's features. She's removed her strings, so the small holes in the hands and feet can be covered with gloves and boots. When fully rested, she can appear to be a six-year-old, or a tiny woman. She is technically a kobalt, but thinks of herself as a marionette.

Polendina, although the villain of this piece, is not mechanistically evil. If she were offered another way to save her family, short of suicide, she'd probably accept it. That she is morally superior to Pinocchio is a very important part of Polendina's identity: she doesn't hurt other people, and tries to avoid other "sins." Abandoning her family to their suffering or being repeatedly dishonest would make her too much like The Liar for comfort, so she's both truthful and driven.

Pinocchio was deceptive, tried to commit murder, and drove Geppetto mad with grief. His reformation occurred after he'd run away to the coast. Polendina doubts Paul's epiphany, because marionettes, like other faeries, can't change their personalities without assistance. It could all be a trick, another ruse to make himself comfortable at the expense of others. Polendina, although she doesn't admit it to herself, envies Pinocchio's humanity and emotional rapport with their father. She expresses this by despising the opportunities Pinocchio wasted, and by loathing him for not coming to his family's rescue, once he was a real boy.

Faerie Might: 15

Size: -2

Characteristics: Int +1, Per +2, Str +5, Sta +5, Prs +2, Com 0, Dex +3, Qik +3

Powers:

Communicate with Animals, 1 point.

Control Element (Terram), 2 points: Can make needles and pins appear from nowhere and fly. Flying needles are not elfshot, but if Polendina returns in later scenarios, she might have developed that power.

Shapechange to Person, 2 points: A variant of the Shapechange to Object power. Polendina's natural form is as a marionette.

Enchant Object (mending needle), 1 point: Empowers the magical needle that Polendina uses to mend marionettes. This can also be used to join together other wooden objects. For example, Polendina can sew a door to its arch. Her joints are always slightly stronger than the surrounding wood.

Traits: Hard Working +3, plus those the GM sees as fitting.

Skills: Tend to the domestic, but also performance and communication skills.

Weapon/Attack	Init	Atk	Dfn	Dam
Scissors	+7	+7	-1	Dam +9
Flying pins (Ranged)	1st +2	+2	Parry -	Dam +3

Dodge: +5

Soak: +7

Fatigue Levels: OK, -1, -6, Incapacitated

Body Levels: OK, -1, -6, Incapacitated

Player Character Involvement

How the PCs become involved in the story will vary depending on their class and experience. One way of introducing them to the story is to have them hired as guards by Paul, who has noticed that someone is entering his house and searching it while he is about town or at night while he sleeps. Oddly, the burglar doesn't force entry, and doesn't seem to steal anything, with the exception of loose change and a little food. His wife Jeanette, a rather pious woman, wants to hire a cleric to bless the house, fearing that some imp or ghost is moving the family's possessions. This provides an alternate hook, or, in the *Ars Magica* setting, an extra complication.

The items in the house are being moved by Polendina as she searches for Paul's marionette. She doesn't want to be seen by the family, so most of her foraging occurs while they sleep. One the few occasions when both Paul and Jeanette are out of the house she searches their chambers. She steals loose change in case she needs to buy transportation back to Geppetto's workshop.

Characters guarding Paul's house may conclude that the thief is looking for a particular item. Paul doesn't want them to search his house, since it would involve damaging his possessions, but they can wait until he is away, much as Polendina does. Paul's marionette body is stored in a wine barrel in his cellar. Polendina hasn't found it yet, because she doesn't have the strength to bust a barrel seal, and wants to search other areas before she starts sawing into things, in case she accidentally damages the marionette. That might mangle a part she needs to repair one of her siblings.

Options

Combat

The simplest, and least attractive, solution is for the player characters to catch Polendina red-handed and chop her to pieces. A complication is that when first discovered Polendina probably looks like a human girl. Combat is unlikely to solve the problem in the long term, because Polendina remains alive even if dismembered, and has the power to patch herself up. Once she finds Pinocchio's doll, she'll fix herself permanently, then take her spares home. To destroy her they need to immobilise her pieces, (by burying them separately for example), or destroy them utterly, by (for example) burning them.

Capture

Polendina will surrender if she feels it is in her interest. Once captured, she has no qualms against revealing Paul's secret, or seeking to turn his protectors. To the morally shady, she can offer the Director's treasure, which isn't large but might tempt low-level characters. For characters of a higher level, she can offer the services of herself and her family. The GM should tailor this potential retinue to be tempting. In an autumnal *Ars Magica* game, she might hint that an injured marionette knows the Arcadian trods that lead to the City of Puppets, where the ability to craft her kind of faerie can be learned (although that, of course, is another story).

Trickery

Polendina can try to trick the characters to her side. If they are taken in by Jeanette's ghost story, Polendina will begin to plant clues which indicate that Paul is guilty of murder. This includes speaking to the characters in her "little girl" form, asking them why they are in the house haunted by the ghost of Jeanette's father. If she's using this ploy, Polendina will be sure to imply that Paul is "undead," so that the characters uncover his faerie nature. She believes this will make killing him less objectionable to them. Although Paul's death would damage his marionette, many of his parts would still be useful. Polendina would prefer an execution, by hanging or drowning if possible, to the usual gore of sword combat because it would ruin fewer of the marionette's parts.

Conclusions

Death

The simplest resolution is that one of the non-player characters dies, probably assisted by the player characters. If they kill Polendina, the characters should then be encouraged to travel to Geppetto's workshop for another story. If they kill Paul, or aid in his death, they may be answerable to the authorities, but if they demonstrate his faerie nature things may go less hard on them.

Deadlock

Characters can stop Polendina's attacks by destroying her family. Were they to die, she'd seek the Land of Puppets in Arcadia to build a new life for herself. Although she's not generally violent, once her family are dead she has no further need for pieces of Paul's marionette. At this extreme she might set fire to Paul's house, after sewing the doors shut. Like all villains who escape to Arcadia, she can return in later stories.

Alternate Solutions

GMs wanting to spare both characters can include another way to mend the puppets in a second scenario. Examples include:

- Go on a quest to find the Lady with Azure Hair, who gave Pinocchio his body. She can cure puppets, or make all of them "real" if she wishes, so that they heal like people.
- Travel the fairs of Europe seeking another puppeteer who will care for Polendina's family. After her experience of abandonment and slavery, Polendina isn't sure such a person exists, and will require skilled convincing.
- Summon Geppetto's ghost, or that of Fire Eater, so that they can train a new puppeteer. Remember that only someone with the Free Expression virtue can successfully make magical marionettes, and only then from the Virtuous woods of certain rare trees.
- Seek a magic item which makes the puppets who touch it animate, so that Polendina can harvest them for pieces.
- Hunt down dryads, the wild form of marionette, so that Polendina can use their body parts to repair her family.
- Journey to the faery Land of Puppets, where marionettes are free and their strings trail languidly into the sky.

Acknowledgements

- *The Adventures of Pinocchio* by Carlo Collodi (Lorenzini) is available online at http://www.ulib.org/webRoot/Books/_Gutenberg_Etext_Books/etext96/pnoco10.txt
- The title is a quotation from "Just a Toy" by Barenaked Ladies, from their *Born on a Pirate Ship* album, which is a lament by an inanimate puppet that wants to incinerate Pinocchio. It provided the spark for this scenario.
- The term "The Liar" appears in the Dead Sea Scrolls, and is echoed in both Pinocchio and "Just a Toy." It may refer to Saint Paul, which is where Pinocchio's Christian name comes from in this scenario.

Now That's a Knife!

Modern Blades in GURPS

by Jeff Fournier

GM: "Ok, your chopper crashed and sank into the ocean. You all made your swimming rolls so you are all on the shore of the island. Because the chopper sank you only have what was on your backs when you jumped in. What are you going to do?"

Players: "I'm cutting down trees with my dagger. I'm making a raft here! How long does it take?"

"We lost the First aid kit in the chopper, so I'll use my bowie knife to cut the shrapnel out of Dukes wound! What's the modifier to my First aid roll?"

"I use my knife to kill a wild pig after stalking it."

(GM checks sheet, it reads "pocket knife." GM shakes head in disbelief.)

Players: "I saw it on a TV show once! Really."

* * *

Whether or not the above has happened to you as a GM, it could in the future. *GURPS* has quite a few excellent rules for simulating the strengths and weakness of a great deal of different things from Guns to Vehicles and Robots. In this article we will go into some guidelines to help you "game simulate" the oldest of man's tools in some of its newest variations. It has been around throughout the ages in many forms and used for many purposes. In modern day we call it the knife.

What Is A Knife?

In *GURPS* terms it is a weapon of several potential basic sizes (Small and Large) as well as a further refined weapon in *GURPS Martial Arts* (such as the kris, parang and tanto). To break it down to its simplest terms it falls into two categories at the same time:

- It's a tool.
- It's a weapon.

It is how different types of blades, and their function in these areas, that make their usefulness far outweigh their size. A small knife may be great for light tool work but not that great for combat. On the other hand, a large knife can be useful for small tasks, it is primarily a big combat tool. It is also by their design and shape that we can find the right knife for the right job. At the end of this article are listed some example knives and their games stats, based upon the following optional category examples of basic shape for the knife's blade, size, and how it was designed to work.

Feel free to pick up a book or magazine which outlines the relative merits and shortcomings of various new blade designs. These are generalities and can be interpreted by GM's as they see fit in their campaigns. Encourage players to have their characters experiment with using different blades in game to find their strengths and weaknesses.

Blade Shapes

Spear

The spear blade is usually long and relatively narrow in width to its length terminating in a sharp point. It is usually sharpened only on one edge for its entire length. Examples exist with a sharp portion of the blade on the back side as well usually running an inch or to from the tip, not the full length (which would make it a dagger). For purposes of this article the Tanto point also resides in this category.

As a weapon it excels at the thrust (+1 to all Thrust damage, not exceeding the max for the weapon) and functions average with the cut. As a tool it has a good utility capability to pry and cut because of its strong blade, giving a +1 modifier to the penalty of -5 for a mechanic or crafter not having any tools when he makes his skill check. It is not, however, the best substitute for chopping if you do not have an axe. The best example of this blade shape would be a straight bayonet blade from any of the world wars, or the main blade on a Swiss Army knife.

Clip Point

A clip point ends in a sharp thin tip with a dished-out portion near the point on the unsharpened side. Examples of this would be a Bowie knife or USMC K-bar combat knife. While the blade's width and sharp point help in any chopping or fine whittling task (again a +1 bonus to the no-tool modifier on skill rolls) it is only average on combat cutting and thrusting. A good-sized clip point blade should not be underestimated in combat as it could easily fell a small tree as easily as a person's limb. It is also a very popular design for hunting knives primarily in America.

Dagger

Everyone is probably quite familiar with the shape and basic function of the dagger, so it will only lightly be touched upon here. As a hand weapon it is excellent as far as knives go, which is reflected in its *GURPS* stats. As a utility blade the dagger can cut, but is a poor chopper. It is very weak in blade strength due to having a second edge grind where a stout back would be to support the blade (giving an additional -1 modifier to any tool use for skill rolls). A critically failed skill check with a dagger will almost certainly result in a broken blade.

Utility

The name really says it all. In non-combat situation the use of a utility style blade should be very helpful (+2 to Skill modifier where appropriate) in any cutting task. Its edge-only blade shape makes it a poor weapon (-1 to hit and damage rolls, no Thrusting).

Larger heavy utility blades like Bolos or machetes have the ability to tackle larger tasks and in some cultures are a useful and valid weapon (+1 Swing damage modifier but still no thrusting).

Examples of this type include a "click from the handle" X-acto type blade to a blunt sheepsfoot blade carried by sailors on board ships. Interestingly enough, the sheepsfoot blade was the only blade that some captains would allow their men on board to carry, fearing that any pointed knife would deal lethal damage instead of just a cut.

Spike

From the Stiletto to the modern Delta Dart made of poly-carbonate, this point only weapon has only one purpose: killing. The favorite of assassins for its hard to heal wound, the spike style blade is a dangerous weapon in combat (+2 to Thrust damage, No swing or cutting). The stiletto is completely useless as a cutting tool except to punch holes in things. While this might give a +1 modifier to leather-working skill, that is about the limit of its use. Any thin "point only, no edge" weapon would qualify as a stiletto blade, even some makeshift ones if they were hard and thin enough.

Fantasy Blade

If you shop at any shop with more than a few knives you will see examples of these flights of fancy in steel. Often made by custom bladesmiths to appeal to the sci-fi and fantasy crowd, these knives are a growing trend in modern

blade ware. Mostly used for show or ritual purposes, these knives do not easily fall into any of the above classifications. They can have serrations (see below), but they are usually not very well-designed. Their wavy impractical blades are poor combat performers at best or unwieldy pieces of junk at worst (-1 to hit and damage). As tools they usually lack any useful cutting edge except perhaps a hook that could open a bottle top. GMs might be willing to grant a character who pulls one in a combat situation an Intimidation check with a +2 bonus to see if his opponent backs down from combat due to his fearsome looking weapon. They would probably make excellent trade goods to a lower tech society who would be amazed by their fantastic shapes. Some warriors would no doubt be known for their choice of such exotic blades, and this could be used to build a reputation and identify them in a fight.

Serrations

In the past decade the modern combat knife scene has exploded with a plethora of new designs and innovations. One of these is adding a serrated edge to the otherwise straight razor edge on modern combat blades. By doing this the now wavy edge puts more blade surface area on the cutting edge of that portion, making it perform like a slightly bigger knife. Most modern users admit it to be a boon when cutting line or other space age tough materials (giving a +1 skill bonus to the appropriate mechanical skills), however it has a increased chance to snag up on something during combat (-1 on ST check to unstick a stuck impaling weapon if it has serrations). On a deep thrust you might find yourself without a weapon. Most modern combat blades come in at least two versions, with or without serrations as the buyer prefers.

Saw Back

During the craze for the *Rambo*-type survival knives of the 80s, saw backs appeared on the unsharpened back of many combat knives of the period. Even today military issue knives such as the Air Force Survival knife have this feature. The ability to use a knife as a saw is a real advantage (+1 to an appropriate skill modifier) however it suffers the same combat disadvantages as blade serrations (see above). Please note that while it is possible for a blade to have serrations and a saw back, the in game penalties as well as the bonuses are cumulative.

Combat Folders

Beginning in the 80s with the advent of space age plastics for handles and improved steel for blades the Modern Combat Folder made its debut. With pocket carry clips (+1 to Holdout) and one-hand opening blades for ease of use, these new breed of knife took the cutlery world by storm. Touted as being foldable for carry but with locks strong enough for actual combat, these folders delivered . . . for a price. The average cost of a quality combat folder in any blade type would be ten to twenty times the price of a average quality knife! While their utility is unquestioned, they suffer from the fact that they are a folding knife doing a fixed blade's job. If ever any skill check (including Combat) critically fails while using the knife as your only tool, it has probably closed on your fingers!

Example Blades

Below are some examples of modern blade ware and their **GURPS** stats as derived from the above information added to the basic knife data from the **GURPS** main rule book where applicable.

Spyderco "Military" Folder (small knife)

Combat Stats: Cut SW-3, Imp Thr, Max Dam 1d+1

Skill use modifiers: +2 to skill tool modifier, +1 to holdout, -1 to Unstick from thrust

Notes: Spear point, serrated, pocket clip, combat folder.

Produced by Spyderco, the pioneers of the modern combat folder, this knife is their answer to the requests of users for a stout folding blade for military/combat applications. It comes with or without serrations as the buyer prefers. Cost is \$150.

Buck 110 Folding Hunter (small knife)

Combat Stats: Cut SW-3, Imp Thr-1, Max Dam 1d+1

Skill Use bonus: +1 tool modifier

Notes: Clip point, lock blade folder.

Invented by Buck knives in the mid 70s as a folding hunting knife, the model 110 soon became the pattern all the other companies copied to grab some of its success. It was an excellent folding field knife and was very popular with Outlaw Bikers and bar room brawlers who called the knife the "Ozark switchblade," even though it wasn't. Its traditional wood and brass parts make it appealing to the eye, and its robust lock and reputation make sure it has continued to sell to the present. Cost is \$39.

Timberline Spec War (large knife)

Combat Stats: Cut SW-2, Imp Thr+1, Max Dam 1d+2

Skill Use bonus: +1 tool modifier

Notes: Spear point (tanto), fixed blade sheath knife.

Pioneered by advances in metallurgy and machine technology, the Timberline company's premier knife, The Spec war, gained an immediate following in the market it was designed for. It is a nearly indestructible tool meant to take more abuse than any knife should. For the last years of the 80s and into the early 90s, practically all special warfare operators wore this knife into harms way on missions. Cost is \$250.

Cold Steel Delta Dart (Small knife)

Combat Stats: Cut -, Imp Thr+2, Max Dam 1d+1

Skill Use bonus: None

Notes: Spike, non-metallic construction.

As a last ditch concealment weapon meant for deep cover or espionage, the Delta Dart (it is not weighted to be thrown, no matter what the name says) is made of a super-strong resin mixture of glass and space-age plastics. Undetectable by metal detectors and capable of piercing a 2x4, this is considered by some as the ultimate spy knife. Cost is \$5.

Sicut MinTan survival knife (Small knife)

Combat Stats: Cut SW-3, Imp Thr, Max Dam 1d+1

Skill Use bonus: +1 to skill modifiers, +1 to Holdout from size/sheath.

Notes: Spear point (tanto), lashing holes, neck sheath, fixed blade.

Created by Australian knife maker Ron Spencer in 2000, the MinTan is intended to function as an emergency survival knife in a small "tobacco tin" style survival kit. With a leather neck sheath to keep it handy (or concealed) the thong that holds the knife around your neck can also be used to tie it through special lashing holes to a stick, making the blade into an impromptu spear in emergencies.

Further Reading

- "Knives, Military Edged Tools and Weapons," from *Brassey's Modern Military Equipment*, by James Marchington. 2000 Brassey's UK Limited
- *Tactical Knives Magazine*.

Pyramid Review

Cosmic Coasters

Cosmic Coasters

Published by [Looney Labs](#)



Designed by Andrew Looney

4 coasters; \$5.00

Remember the night when you dumped an entire Guinness on your copy of the original *Cosmic Encounter* at the Stop 'N' Gulp Tavern? Or how about that time you were enjoying the *Age of Renaissance* and you mistakenly invaded a glop of nacho cheese left there from the last time you played at Taco Heaven? If you long to indulge in some gaming while eating out or tossing a few back, yet are fearful of loosing your supplies to an accidental spill, Looney Labs has the perfect game for you: *Cosmic Coasters*. Not only does it feature simple mechanics ideal for a noisy atmosphere, *Cosmic Coasters* is resistant to all manner of dining trauma because the board is made out of beer coasters.

Each of the four coasters has a moon of Jupiter printed in color under a grid of nine spaces. Every player needs one moon and seven coins; or seven cheese snacks, or tiny pretzels, or anything that can represent space ships on the coasters. To win, a player must teleport to her opponent's moon, then teleport back home. The rules are simple, fitting entirely on the back of a single coaster. Like all good abstract strategy games, though, the rules are deceptively short. The game's strategy is satisfyingly deep and luck plays an acceptably minor roll in determining the winner.

A moon has nine spaces made up of four Factories, four Control Points, and one Teleport Pad. On a turn, a player can teleport from his moon to another moon, build a new ship in a Factory, or move a ship and engage in combat.

Players can teleport a ship if they have one on the Teleport Pad and if they have at least two ships in Control Points on the moon. Most importantly, the opposing player can possess no more than one Control Point on the same moon. Thus, if both players possess two Control Points on a moon, no one can teleport from that moon. At the beginning of the game, teleporting to your opponent's moon is easy, teleporting back home to win is much more difficult.

To make travel a bit easier, a player can destroy an opponent's ship by teleporting on to it. If the opponent has ships in the Control Points on either side of a Factory, however, she can create a new ship to replace the old one, to a maximum of seven ships.

Players may move a ship one space each turn. If they land in an occupied space, then combat is resolved through Rock-Paper-Scissors. Wait! Don't hit your web browser's Back button! Granted, Rock-Paper-Scissors is not the most original game mechanic out there, but there are several benefits for this game. First, most everyone knows how to play it, so teaching the game is easy. Second, in a noisy environment, such as a bar, it requires no shouting. Players need only be able to see one another. Finally, it offers three possible outcomes, allowing combat to be weighted in favor of the attacker. This is more interesting than a coin flip and yet does not require dice.

If an attacker wins Rock-Paper-Scissors, then the defender's ship is destroyed and the attacker now occupies that space. If the players tie, then the defender's ship is destroyed, but the attacker returns to its original space. If the defender wins, then nothing happens and the turn is wasted. Thus, combat is weighted in favor of the aggressor and players must work with these odds to be successful. A defensive strategy is not necessarily a good one in *Cosmic Coasters*.

Finally, borrowing a concept from the aforementioned *Cosmic Encounter*, each player has a Special Power. There are four choices. Stinging Defense means that an attacker can lose a ship to the defender during combat. Rapid Transit allows a player to move two spaces at a time. Teleport Inhibitor forces invaders to win Rock-Paper-Scissors to teleport

on to your moon. A player with Warning System is not destroyed when an invader teleports on to her ship. Fans of *Cosmic Coasters* will certainly begin to come up with new powers after wearing out these four.

This simple rules set leads to some agonizing tactical decisions. Generally, players teleport a couple of ships to an opponent's moon, take over a factory to build new ships, then try to knock their opponent off of the final Control Points so they can teleport home. Because every player is being aggressive at the same time, the decision whether to advance a strategy on an opponent's moon or take care of things at home can be delightfully frustrating. While any one match of Rock-Paper-Scissors is not interesting, stringing twenty or more together presents a psychological game within the game.

Cosmic Coasters is designed for two players; however, additional rules allow for up to four. In this version, players must teleport to and from the moon on their left. The game does not work perfectly with more than two players, unfortunately. If one player is more defensive than the rest, then his opponent to the left stands a good chance of winning as they are not busy dealing with an invasion.

Cosmic Coasters succeeds at exactly what it sets out to accomplish. It is durable, playable with a minimum of pieces and table space, and requires little verbal communication. At the same time, it offers a strategic challenge and some goofy fun. If you do not think it sounds particularly goofy, wait until you see the stares you get from the rest of the bar after playing your fourteenth game of Rock-Paper-Scissors and raising your fists in triumph.

-- *Brad Weier*

Terror in Freeport (for d20)

Published by [Green Ronin Publishing](#)



Written by **Robert J. Toth**

32 b&w pages; \$7.99

Terror in Freeport is the second adventure in the *Freeport* trilogy. Sporting another powerful cover by Brom that has little if anything to do with the adventure itself, *Terror in Freeport* is a roleplaying adventure with little in common with the dungeon hacks of *Sunless Citadel* or *Forge of Fury*.

The set up is nice with a brief history of Freeport, the previous adventure, *Death in Freeport*, and an adventure synopsis that gives the GM the bare bones of the adventure. After that, the adventure, designed for four 3rd level characters, starts in earnest.

[SPOILER ALERT!]

The adventure pits the players against politicians and the Cult of the Yellow Sign. Players will have lots of interaction with city guards and priests of Knowledge to get the truth they seek. Some of the twists and turns are a little humdrum like having the characters return to the Temple of the Unspeakable one, now The Abandoned Temple, while others, like the true identity of Thuron nicely play into information already provided about the ancient serpent people.

The adventure has one major flaw: a cliffhanger style ending. Sure, characters can go through the free adventure on the Green Ronin website or enjoy any number of d20 sourcebooks out, but that will defiantly throw the timing and urgency of the whole series off. A minor flaw is the advice, "give XP for innovative solutions." Because that's the extent of the advice.

[END SPOILER]

One of the nice things is that stats aren't spread though the book. Instead, all the stats are rounded up to Appendix, with a breakdown by townsfolk, creatures, and named opponents. The handouts include an illustration of a book and a written speech. Remember the pre-generated characters from *Death In Freeport*? They're back, only now they're all 3rd level. It's nice to see how they advance, but since this isn't a starter adventure, are pre-generated characters really necessary? The book ends with Appendix 2: Licensing Agreements which is the infamous OGL and d20 System Trademark License.

The layout is the standard two columns of text with illustrations breaking up the pace. Text to be read to the players is boxed off in light gray, and text the GM should pay close attention to -- The Real Story -- is boxed in dark gray with white text so that GMs don't get confused. On another note, the map of a landmark from the first adventure is a reprint, but takes up one quarter of the space. If maps can maintain their readability at such a small scale, I'm all for it, but I fear that because the map was a reprint, that future maps will indeed take up a whole page.

One of the things I don't like is the wasted interior cover space. I understand that pricing is an issue, and at \$7.99, *Terror in Freeport* is one of the least expensive full length adventures out. Even so, I would love to have seen those maps and handouts presented there. Those wishing to base a campaign in Freeport might want to buy all three adventures, gather all the "Focus on Freeport" material from the Green Ronin Website, and then run the whole thing like a seamless epic. Those just looking for a night or two of gaming, especially those who haven't run *Death in Freeport*, will have a little more effort to customize the adventure, but the payout is worth it.

-- *Joe G. Kushner*

Pyramid Review

Transactions of the Royal Martian Geographical Society - The Journal of Victorian Era Role-Playing (for Space 1889)

Published by [Heliograph Inc.](#)

Created by Dr. Mark Clark (Ed.) et al.

\$20 (vol. 1), \$22 (vol. 2), \$18 (vol. 3)

For the gamer with a discerning taste for playing in a more polite, civilized era, 2000 was a vintage year. Not only did we see two *GURPS supplements* - *Castle Falkenstein* and the incomparable *Steampunk*, as well as Marcus L. Rowland's *Forgotten Futures*, but also the return of the RPG that can claim to have initiated the interest in combining all things Victorian with other genres. GDW's *Space 1889* melded Science Fiction and Victoriana to create a fantastic setting that cast the colonial and imperial urges of the great powers across the ether to Mars and Venus. Long out of print, Heliograph Inc. has reprinted not only the rulebook, but all of GDW's supplementary materials, with two GDW titles reprinted in each of the new Heliograph books.

Alongside the official GDW books, Heliograph have also released three volumes of the *Space 1889* fanzine, *Transactions of the Royal Martian Geographical Society (TRMGS)*, combining a mixture of reprinted and new material. First published in the early 1990s, and later to include GDW's official *Space 1889* newsletter, Ether Society News, Heliograph reprints the first four issues of the original fanzine in their first volume, issues five through eight in the second, whilst the third contains material only seen previously on the Heliograph Web site.

Each volume is an A5 sized thick book, averaging approximately two hundred pages in length, and printed on slightly yellowed paper. Layout is decent, if rudimentary, but the artwork is not. At best, the original line art could be called charming but quirky. The period reproduction art is far better, but the standard of all the art improves markedly over the course of the three volumes. Unfortunately the maps let the series down badly, as some are very rough. Since these books have been completely reprinted, there is little reason why the maps that needed redrawing could not have been so.

Although *TRMGS* is subtitled *The Journal of Victorian Era Role-Playing* (later of *Historical Science Fiction Role-Playing*), its coverage of roleplaying games outside of *Space 1889* is limited. Primarily this is an occasional foray into *Cthulhu by Gaslight* or rather, Cthulhu 1889. In the third volume, this expands slightly with a scenario suitable for *Castle Falkenstein* ("Queen Victoria and the Zeppelin Pirates") and an article for *GURPS* on gaming with Captain Nemo. Although this has been reprinted from *Pyramid*, it will be useful additional material to that already given in *GURPS Steampunk*. Also included is an alternative Victorian-era Mars for those that do not find the Mars of *Space 1889* their cup of tea.

The trilogy includes little that is of use for the *Space 1889* miniatures rules, *Soldier's Companion*, but provides several bits and pieces for the board game, *Sky Galleons of Mars*. The focus, however, is more on the *Space 1889* roleplaying game, and as such there is much more information for that game in these books. This includes new character careers and backgrounds for Mars and Earth, as well as examinations of the Martian religions and the presence of the Russians, the French, their Foreign Legion, the Japanese and Suffragettes on Mars. There are a few independent scenarios across the trilogy, but the majority comes from the editor's own Transactions campaign. While pre-generated characters are provided for all seven parts, the campaign is not tailored specifically to them, being generic enough that any characters could be used. If I have a quibble about the campaign, it is that it occasionally lapses into unnecessarily Pythonesque humor, which is perhaps a little uncivilized.

What is apparent from the many articles in these three books is that the editor and several of the writers are history post-graduates, specializing in the nineteenth century and the growth of technology. Even if the GM is not planing to run a *Space 1889* game specifically, it is these articles that should interest the Victorian gamer. Few of these are game specific, making their contents suited to any set of rules. This is where *TRMGS* justifies its own description as *The Journal of Victorian Era Role-Playing*.

In the end, *Transactions of the Royal Martian Geographical Society* is aimed squarely at the *Space 1889* fan. For them these three volumes should prove highly useful, not to say entertaining additions to their games. Yet there is still enough information in the books for them to be a boon to the fan of the Victorian Science Fiction or Steampunk genres.

-- *Matthew Pook*

Rebounding: The Return of Spring-Heeled Jack

*"For life is but a dream whose shapes return,
Some frequently, some seldom, some by night
And some by day, some night and day: we learn,
The while all change and many vanish quite,
In their recurrence with recurrent changes
A certain seeming order; where this ranges
We count things real; such is memory's might."*

-- James Thomson, *The City of Dreadful Night*, I:iii (1870)

A little over two years ago, we discussed the undying, the uncatchable, the downright uncanny knotted tangle of urban legend and ultraterrestrial known as Spring-Heeled Jack. (Jump [back there](#) and catch up, if the details have blurred.) Although that column conveyed the basics, from Jack's best-known appearances in Victorian England to his alchemical and superheroic resonances, there's more ground left to cover, even (especially) on spring-shod bootheels. The more you look for Jack's tracks, the more you'll find -- if only because someone (or something) like Spring-Heeled Jack will always bounce back.

"We became afraid to go out after dark . . . He'd jump out at people, from behind a tree, maybe, or over a wall -- a figure dressed all in black. He was very agile; some people said he must have had springs on his feet."

-- Matt Costa, recalling the Provincetown Phantom of 1938

Between the first rash of assaults and encounters in 1837-1838 and his star turn at the Aldershot barracks in 1877, Jack continued to appear. His stomping (jumping?) grounds ranged along the south of England from Yarmouth to Teignmouth, with major appearances in the south London suburb of Peckham in the fall of 1872, and venturing as far north as Sheffield in Yorkshire in the spring of 1873. In his Sheffield rampage, Jack wore a white sheet and ominously prowled near the Cholera Monument in the park. After a brief appearance in Liverpool in 1888 (during the Ripper killings in his old hometown -- a Jacks' quarrel?) and a return to Sheffield in the 1890s, Jack diverted further north to Bradford in September of 1926.

Overseas, Jack carried out a reign of mischief and assault in Provincetown (on Massachusetts' Cape Cod) between October 1938 and December 1945, although there he blew blue flame and jumped around as the "Black Flash" or the "Provincetown Phantom." More intriguingly still, the people of Nazi-occupied Prague enjoyed the antics of "the Springer" who leaped over rooftops after curfew and pestered the SS -- and shivered at the attacks of "the Razor Blade Man" in the spectral streets of the onetime alchemists' paradise. (Are these tales the surface ripples of a wartime Jacks' alliance, flowing between shadowy London and haunted Prague through John Dee's old Enochian gateways? And if not, why not?) After the war, tales of "hopping mannikins" and "spiral hoppers" plagued East German Saxony and Thuringia in 1950-51 -- were the Jacks and the [Werwolves](#) cooperating in some occult op at the dawn of the Cold War? Perhaps this mésalliance created the "creatures that walk like dogs, have faces like pigs, eyes like bulbs, and springs on their feet" that plagued Uttar Pradesh in India in 1996.

"A reporter . . . adopted every means for obtaining information on the subject, and personally visited many of the places above-mentioned, where he found that, although the stories were in everybody's mouth, no person who had actually seen the ghost could be found."

-- The *London Morning Herald*, January 10, 1838

Although Jack's earliest appearances, before the ectoplasmic mold had quite set, varied just as much as his Indian bastard spawn. Eyewitness reports described Jack as a ghost, a bear, a devil, a figure in brass armor, and a mailed figure wearing bullock's horns. In his white-clad animal form, Jack may be the similarly-agile "Hammersmith ghost" of 1803. The multiplicity of reports coalescing into one mostly-standardized form seems to be standard procedure for a mass-hysterical panic (or, one supposes, an ultraterrestrial incursion), as the UFO flaps demonstrate. Another example is the case of the Phantom of O'Donnell Heights, whose nocturnal prowlings and assaults terrorized that Baltimore housing project in the summer of 1951. The original descriptions varied, but after only a few days, the Phantom

became a "tall, thin, black-clad figure with a hideous face" -- who could leap 20 feet straight up without leaving a footprint. (One local official blamed Batman.) All these tangles leave us no wiser, with the truth (or truths) safely sprung out of our grasp. It's enough to make one suspect some deliberate hand at work in the disappearance from the British Library (during the Blitz, while Jack was out of the country) of all three anonymous 1838 broadsheets dealing with his exploits, especially the evocative *Authentic Particulars of the Awful Appearance of Spring-Heeled Jack; Together with His Extraordinary Life, etc.*

"In one chronicle there is a reference to a de la Poer as 'cursed of God in 1307,' whilst village legendry had nothing but evil and frantic fear to tell... The fireside tales were of the most grisly description, all the ghastlier because of their frightened reticence and cloudy evasiveness. They represented my ancestors as a race of hereditary daemons beside whom Gilles de Retz and the Marquis de Sade would seem the veriest tyros, and hinted whisperingly at their responsibility for the occasional disappearances of villagers through several generations."
-- H.P. Lovecraft, "The Rats in the Walls"

Which is where the conspiracy theories come in. The earliest newspaper stories of Jack's 1838 appearances blame "a member of a certain band of aristocrats, who, for a wager," has impersonated "a ghost, a bear, and a devil" in order to "destroy the lives of . . . as many servant girls as [he] can, by depriving them of their reason, and otherwise accelerating their deaths." Henry de la Poer Beresford, the 3rd Marquis of Waterford, the Regency "blood" and usual suspect for the "aristocratic Jack," was a famously eccentric wagerer; last time we discussed some of the other evidence (well, hearsay) that leads Peter Haining to finger him for the crimes in *The Legend and Bizarre Crimes of Spring-Heeled Jack*. (In this context, it's interesting that the same rumor -- of a wager to frighten insensible "a certain number of individuals between then [Easter] and Whitsuntide" -- shows up in the 1873 Sheffield reporting, too. A Discordian conspiracy of Madness by Deed?) The Marquis of Waterford was also a Freemason, knew both Gypsies and "men advanced in mathematics," and was the nephew of the founder of the arch-conservative Orange Order -- which London CID inspector McNaghten believed [Jack the Ripper](#) killed to thwart. And again, our dueling Jacks turn up in this bet.

*"Now is the Time that Rakes their Revells keep;
Kindlers of Riot, enemies of Sleep . . .
Who has not heard the Scowrer's Midnight Fame?
Who has not trembled at the Mohock's Name?
Was there a Watchman took his hourly Rounds,
Safe from their Blows, or new-invented Wounds?
I pass their desp'rate Deeds, and Mischiefs done
Where from Snow-hill black steepy Torrents run;."*
-- John Gay, *Trivia: Or, The Art of Walking The Streets of London*, Book III (1716)

But conspiratorial mischief doesn't begin with Jack; the London of 125 years earlier quailed under the outrages of the Mohocks (named, like the punk haircut, for the Mohawk Indian tribe). Under the rule of a mysterious "Emperor" (with a Turkish crescent "engraved" on his forehead), between 1712 and 1714 these spoiled "peers and persons of quality" assaulted young women and "late pedestrians" with swords and razors. The ruling Tories accused the Whigs of fomenting "a nocturnal fraternity" to overthrow the government -- and when on Lammas, 1714, Queen Anne did, in fact, die, the government did, in fact, fall to the Whigs. Spring-Heeled Jack's occasional horns come to mind with the Mohocks' fellow rakehells, the Bold Bucks, whose aggressive paganism and devotion to violence and orgies recall the crazed followers of [Dionysos](#). Did some alchemical confectioner mix the [chocolate](#) at the Whig Kit-Kat Club to an ancient Dionysiac formula, sending young aristocrats pouring through Hawksmoor's haunted London streets in search of blood and madness?

"But, as usual, he walked to and fro, and during the day did not pass from out the turmoil of that street. And, as the shades of the second evening came on, I grew wearied unto death, and, stopping fully in front of the wanderer, gazed at him steadfastly in the face. He noticed me not, but resumed his solemn walk, while I, ceasing to follow, remained absorbed in contemplation. 'The old man,' I said at length, 'is the type and the genius of deep crime. He refuses to be alone. He is the man of the crowd. It will be in vain to follow, for I shall learn no more of him, nor of his deeds."
-- Edgar Allan Poe, "The Man of the Crowd" (1840)

So, perhaps the secret to Jack is not a single immortal ultraterrestrial, or even a bisociated blending, but a whole deck of Jacks, spirits of [urban fantastic](#) frenzy and nocturnal nightmare flooding forth every 125 years from 1713 to 1838 to the Mods and Rockers of 1963. Go back 125 years, and you get that fulcrum year of 1588, when [Christopher Marlowe](#) (speaking of death by Whitsuntide) and the University Wits dueled in the streets of theatrical London. Are the Jacks simply Maenads and Bacchantes? The faerie host of the Sluagh, the restless dead? Immaterial urgencies, primal totems as in the movie *Nomads*? The [Wild Hunt](#)? Or could they be the torch-bearing followers of the faerie swan-queen Aine (thus joining Spring-Heeled Jack's occasional wings and breaths of fire together), boiling out of the Beresford family lands on the southern reaches of Knock Aine and into London and history and nightmare -- and your game? Whatever your game, make sure that Jacks are wild.

The Realm of the Inca

An Empire of Magic and Super-Science for GURPS Castle Falkenstein

by James L. Cambias

In the history of our own world, the Inca civilization was destroyed by civil war, the Spanish conquest, and disease. But beyond the Faerie Veil in the universe of *GURPS Castle Falkenstein*, the fate of the Inca was very different. There, the Inca had fantastically advanced science and sorcery, and their empire has survived in isolation until the Steam Age.

The Empire

The Incan Empire is called Tahuantinsuyu by its people. The empire extends along the western coast of Antillea, from Gran Colombia clear down to Chile, and inland to the eastern foothills of the Andes. The Empire has over 7 million inhabitants, making it the equal of many New European powers.

The subjects of the Inca are a variety of tribes, including Quechua, Aymara, Cara, Nazca, Chimu and Chibcha. Each of tribe has its own language. The Inca clan uses Quechua as the court language, and most inhabitants of the empire speak that tongue in addition to their native dialect. The people of the empire are pure-blooded Indians; no immigration is allowed.

The empire is divided into four sectors, each under an Inca governor. The provinces come together at Cuzco, the capital. Each province is divided in turn into smaller areas called sayas.

The northern sector extends from Cuzco to Gran Colombia. In the far north of this region live the Chibcha, who had an advanced culture before they were conquered by the Inca. South of them, just on the equator, are the Cara. The Chimu dwell between the Cara.

The western province includes the area between Cuzco and the sea, and includes the territory of the Inca and the Nazca plain. The southern province encompasses Lake Titicaca and extends down to Chile and the Argentine, and is inhabited by the Aymara people; it is the richest of the four provinces.

The eastern province of the empire includes the bulk of the Quechua tribal lands northeast of Cuzco. Beyond them the province is sparsely settled, and much of it is a military buffer zone against the Amazon tribes and Brazil. Great fortress-cities like Machu Picchu guard the mountain passes.

Major cities of the realm include Quito, which sits only a few miles south of the Equator and has a quarter-million people; Huanuco, an important silver-mining center with 200,000 inhabitants; Popayan, the northernmost metropolis with 150,000 people; Chanchan on the southern coast, once the capital of its own empire ruled by the Chimu tribe; and Cajamarca, the summer residence of the Sapa Inca, home to 100,000 citizens. The greatest city by far is Cuzco, the capital, with a million inhabitants.

The empire's economy is based on agriculture, and is entirely controlled by the government. The chief crops are potatoes and corn. Other food plants include mushrooms, peppers, beans, bananas, yams and melons. Guinea pigs are the most common domestic animal -- most households have a dozen or so running about underfoot. Herds of llamas, guanacos and vicunas supply wool and meat. The people drink beer made from corn or potatoes.

Every scrap of fertile land is carefully cultivated, and the sides of many valleys are intricately terraced to prevent erosion, and look like colossal staircases. Water is carried to the fields in stone aqueducts which far surpass anything the Romans constructed.

The People

The subjects of the Inca are proud and dignified, reserved in the presence of strangers. But they are not without a sense of humor and fun. The common folk like to get together to drink beer, sing songs accompanied by drums and flutes, and dance.

The people of the mountains wear llama and alpaca wool, and weave wonderful designs in subtle colors. The common attire for men is a wool tunic, a heavy cloak and leggings, topped off with a wool stocking-cap with earflaps. Women wear long dresses and a shorter cloak, with hats that are remarkably like a New European gentleman's bowler. Men cut their hair to neck length, and women wear theirs in long, lustrous braids.

Andean mountain dwellers have very deep chests, and beaky noses. They have astonishing stamina, and can perform great feats of labor at altitudes that leave lowlanders gasping. An Andean mountain dweller's legs are like steel, and they think nothing of going a thousand feet up or down a steep slope on an errand.

Subjects of the Incan Empire generally marry at about age thirty. Families are relatively small, and the population has been steady for centuries. Sons take their fathers' surnames and daughters bear the names of their mothers.

History

The Inca clan has controlled their empire for thousands of years. They claim to be descended from godlike beings who live among the stars. According to the Inca, humans lived in ignorance and savagery, and the wise and powerful star beings saw this and pitied mankind. To help humanity, the sky beings chose two of their number and set them down on Earth, in a high mountain region where conditions were similar to their home in the heavens.

This pair was the ancestors of the Inca clan, Manco Capac and his sister Ocllo Huaca. They landed on an island in Lake Titicaca. Equipped with a magical golden rod and amazing knowledge of magic and science, the two persuaded the tribes of the Andes to accept them as rulers. The two children of the heavens instructed humans in all the arts of civilization -- farming, irrigation, and building. Manco Capac built the city of Cuzco in a single night, using magic to raise huge stone blocks into place.

The Inca and their subjects gradually conquered the other tribes of the region, using their amazing flying pyramids and Sun-Fire projectors to overwhelm any opposition. They left the defeated lands as semi-autonomous provinces under Inca governors. With the amazing technology of the Inca, the empire prospered. Great cities grew in the mountains.

In 1532, a Spanish expedition under Pizarro entered the territory of the Inca from the north. The Empire was disorganized in the aftermath of a power struggle between the Emperor Atahualpa and his brother Huascar. Taking advantage of the confusion, the Spanish were able to march as far as Cajamarca. But by then Atahualpa had finished overthrowing his brother, and was able to turn the full force of his army against Pizarro's men. Only one survivor returned to Panama. Since that time the Inca have guarded their empire with ceaseless vigilance. The border is clearly marked with stone cairns, and anyone crossing into Inca territory risks destruction.

Cuzco, City of the Sun

The great city of Cuzco stands at the center of the Inca Empire, in a great valley surrounded by looming mountains. Its name means "Navel of the World." Cuzco is an enormous city, with a population of just under 1 million. The city is a place of wonders, with great pyramids and towers of 100 stories.

Cuzco proper is inhabited only by the Inca clan. There are 12 wards, one for each of the Inca *ayllu*, or sub-clans. Outside the walls stretch suburbs where the ordinary folk of the empire live. There are two great squares in the center of Cuzco -- the Plaza of Joy, used for celebrations of happy occasions, and the Plaza of Tears, site of serious religious observances.

Over it all looms the colossal Sacsahuaman Fortress, covering six acres and built of stones twelve feet square. The fortress's high walls are topped with Sun-Fire projectors, and at least one Sky Pyramid floats above Cuzco as a reminder of the Sapa Inca's might. The Inca himself lives in the fortress, and other members of his family are scattered about the city in great palaces of their own.

The greatest temple in Cuzco is Coricancha, the Garden of Gold, sacred to the Sun. The building is huge and beautiful, with gold dust mixed in the very mortar. A great gold Sun disk stand in the center of the temple, decorated with emeralds and turquoise. The priests of the Sun welcome the dawn with chants and incense as the first rays strike the disk each morning.

Behind the royal palace is a complex of schools where the young nobles of the Inca are educated and trained in magic, science and the use of the quipu. Nearby is the convent of the Sun Virgins, who are the custodians of Inca medical lore and maintain the health of the Sapa Inca.

Cuzco has a municipal water system fed by mountain springs, and the water is conveyed by aqueducts all through the city. A system of sewers carries waste off to storage tanks, where it is transformed into fertilizer. A complex of baths stands above the city where hot springs issue from the mountainside, and the hot tubs are a favorite lounging-place of Inca nobility. The modest Inca have separate buildings for men and women.

The Court of the Sapa Inca

Government of the Empire is held entirely by the Inca clan. At the top, of course, is the Sapa Inca himself, the lord of the Andes and Son of the Sun. The Sapa Inca, known generally as just "the" Inca, is the absolute ruler of his domain. He wears a hat with a gold fringe as a badge of office, and carries a golden mace and golden staff as symbol of authority. The staff is a magical artifact of great power, the same one borne by Manco Capac. He sits on a throne of solid gold.

The Sapa Inca is assisted by a Council of the Realm, made up of the governors of the empire's four provinces and representatives of the 12 wards of Cuzco. The Council advises and informs the emperor, but the ultimate decision-making power lies with him. Under weak emperors the Council is powerful; under strong ones it seldom meets at all.

During the summer the Inca holds court at his pleasure-palace at Cajamarca, amid hot springs and gardens. Otherwise he rules from the Sacshauaman Fortress at Cuzco. Etiquette at the court is rigid and complex. Everyone entering the presence of the Inca must remove their shoes and bear a symbolic burden on their backs.

The Inca has a corps of inspectors, known as *Tocoyricoc*. They travel about the empire in secret, looking for officials who are not performing their jobs, signs of rebellion among the subject tribes, plots among Inca nobles and potential problems requiring help from the imperial government.

To protect the Son of the Sun, there is an Imperial Guard, made up of men from the Canari tribe near Quito. They are imposing warriors, with fantastic headdresses of gold and feathers. The Imperial Guards carry the dreaded Sun-Fire weapons, which emit a dazzling beam of light which destroys whatever it touches.

The standing army is nearly as impressive. The Incan Empire has 50,000 men under arms, organized into regiments of 1,000 men each. Each regiment has its own uniform and traditions, and draws its members from specific tribes. They are armed with a variety of weapons: slings throwing explosive grenades, fire-sprayers, blowguns with poison darts, spears, bows, and maces. Certain regiments specialize in night fighting, sieges or guerrilla warfare.

One interesting feature of Inca government is that the mummies of previous rulers are preserved in their royal residences, with servants and attendants. By means of sorcery the current Inca can commune with his predecessors and get their advice on matters of state.

All the Inca nobles are recognizable by their elongated ears, into which they insert studs of jade, gold or turquoise. The Inca royal family and nobility are rather inbred. It is the custom of the emperors to marry only within their immediate

family, and this practice is followed by the other great nobles as well.

While the imperial throne is hereditary, it does not pass automatically to a single candidate. Instead, all of the Inca's male descendants are eligible to succeed him. The heirs constantly intrigue against each other, and use poison, assassination, sorcery and blackmail to get rid of rivals.

There are several factions right now at the Sapa Inca's court. The traditionalists wish to preserve the Incan Empire's isolation from the Lower Kingdoms. For thousands of years the empire has prospered by itself, needing nothing from the outside world. The Spanish invasion proved that all outsiders are barbarians and savages. This is still the Inca's official position, and has the support of most of the Inca clan.

The "progressive" faction wishes to increase the empire's contact with the outside world. There is much to be learned in the outside world, and all may benefit by the sharing of knowledge. If the Incan Empire does not change, it may someday fall to a new set of conquistadores armed with weapons that match the dreaded Sun-Fire itself! This faction is small, but includes some of the cleverest and best-educated members of the Inca clan.

A third faction also wish to end the empire's isolation. Armed with the might of Inca sorcery and super-science, the Sapa Inca's armies could easily defeat the disorganized and disunited nations of Antillea. A few even envision expanding across the seas, forging a vast worldwide empire ruled from Cuzco. This view has support among the warriors who would gain glory leading the armies, and among the minor nobility.

Justice in the Incan Empire is severe; the penalty for murder, robbery, rape or fraud is execution -- usually by being hurled from a cliff. The penalty for disobeying a command of the Sapa Inca is the death of the offender and his entire family. In a novel twist, the local administrator is also punished when a crime is committed, on the assumption that he has not been doing his job.

Viracocha II, Sapa Inca and Son of the Sun

The Emperor Viracocha is a weak ruler, devoted to study and pleasure. In his youth he was a vigorous monarch, but as he enters his second century he has withdrawn, and now leaves most of the running of his empire to the bureaucrats and the Council of the Realm. Viracocha is a tall, lordly old man who spends much of his time listening to poets sing of the past. He is nearly blind and goes everywhere with a young boy to guide him.

ST: 8

DX: 8

IQ: 12

HT: 8

Move: 5

Advantages: Filthy Rich with Multimillionaire, Longevity, Magery 2, Manual Dexterity +2, Status 8.

Disadvantages: Blind, Laziness, Weak Will -2.

Quirks: Collects wives, Enjoys poetry, Pretends he can still see, Recites epics from memory.

Skills: Administration-12, Area Knowledge (Inca Empire)-18, Dancing-12, Diplomacy-14, Lorebook (Lore of the Sun)-18, Lorebook (Lore of the Mountains)-16, Lorebook (Lore of the Lines)-14, Lorebook (Lore of the Virgins)-12, Poetry-18, Poisons-14, Politics-12, Ritual Magic-18, Weird Science-14.

Marvels of Inca Science

The technology of the Incas is astounding. They have preserved the knowledge given to Manco Capac by the star-dwellers centuries ago, and have added new techniques developed by the engineers of the empire. Among the Inca, there is not nearly as rigid a distinction between science and magic as in Western civilization. Many of their devices

combine magic and technology, and they may have a form of Engine Magick inherited from the star beings. In general, ordinary people of the empire live at a very mature TL3, but the advanced weapons and devices of the ruling clan are TL12 or better.

A surprising lack is the complete absence of the wheel among the Inca. Despite their splendid road system, they do not use wagons or any kind of wheeled vehicles. Small loads are carried by llamas or porters; heavy items are levitated by Inca anti-gravity machines or magic.

The Inca engineers are remarkable stonemasons, constructing walls so carefully joined that one cannot force a pin between the stones. Their architecture favors massive walls and narrow windows. Buildings have high-peaked roofs of thatch. Heat comes from smoky fires of brushwood or dried llama dung.

Nowhere is the Inca gift for building more visible than in the road system. There are roads stretching thousands of miles across Inca territory. They wind across the face of sheer cliffs, pass through tunnels carved through mountains, and cross chasms on suspension bridges. The chief highway runs north from Cuzco through Cajamarca, Quito and finally to Pasto. Southward the highway goes to Lake Titicaca, and stretches to the borders of Chile and the Argentine. All along the roads are inns for travellers, maintained by the government.

The art of writing is unknown among the Inca. However, they are not without a way of recording information. The Inca use knotted strings, called *quipu*, as record-keeping devices. The number and pattern of knots of a quipu can encode numbers, allowing the Inca empire to keep extensive records about population, taxes, and all the other business of government. All young men of the Inca clan are trained in reading quipu.

For other information, the Inca make use of a specially-trained caste of secretaries whose memories are absolutely photographic. After years of training, the Inca "rememberers" can hold a virtual encyclopedia in their heads, using a quipu as a guide to recall. These secretaries are a vital part of the empire's government, and are expected to be absolutely reliable. Any "rememberer" caught telling a lie is sentenced to hard labor in the quicksilver mines.

Crystals and jewels are a key part of Inca science. Using intricate arrangements of rubies, they can create the destructive Sun-Fire beams. Crystals also play an important part in Inca medicine, as their healers have learned to use crystals to focus energies that fight disease.

Most tools in the Inca Empire are of a superior alloy of bronze. Iron is known, and there are abundant veins of iron ore, but the Incan Empire lacks supplies of coal for steelmaking. Gold and silver metalwork made by Andean craftsmen is beautiful.

Inca medical knowledge is advanced. They know of the germ theory of disease, and practice vaccination. This was one reason the Inca suffered far less than other New World peoples from the diseases introduced by the Conquistadores. Surgery has been developed to a high art among the Inca. Doctors even perform brain surgery. Inca medicine incorporates much magical healing, as well. The Sapa Inca benefits from the magical art of "sharing life" practiced by the Sun Virgins. The Sun Virgins use magic to age themselves a few months, and transfer the lost time to the emperor. This is how the Inca rulers reign for more than a century.

The source of power for many of the Inca's most astounding machines is something they call "Blood of the Sun," a form of magical fusion power. Gravity has long been conquered by the Inca. Using the Blood of the Sun to power machines which must be magical Engines, they can raise objects of any size, as their flying Sky Pyramids demonstrate. Inca magicians are also masters of the art of levitation, which is of great use in such a mountainous country.

Sun-Fire Beams

These weapons emit a dazzling beam of light, which burns and destroys whatever it touches. The Sun-Fire beams come in two sizes. The smaller ones are a staff the size of a spear, tipped with a crystal lens. They are the equivalent of **GURPS Space** laser rifles, doing 2d impaling damage with a 1/2 damage range of 450 yards. Small Sun-Fire beams

may be used 6 times before they need recharging.

The larger Sun-Fire projectors are enormous Infernal Engines used as artillery. They are mounted on the flying Sky Pyramids and on the battlements of Inca fortresses. The giant Sun-Fire beams are focussed by a gigantic gold Sun disk studded with jewels. Large Sun-fire beams are the equivalent of *GURPS Space* light starship lasers, doing 100d damage (1d space combat damage), with a 1/2 damage range of 110,000 yards in air.

Sky Pyramids

The Sky Pyramids are the most impressive symbols of the Sapa Inca's power. They are large pyramids of some ceramic material, roughly a hundred yards square at the base and fifty yards high. The shining gold sides are decorated with images of the sun. They fly by means of the secret Inca anti-gravity device, powered by Sun's Blood power generators. Sky Pyramids are relatively slow flyers, moving at a stately pace of about 20 miles per hour. Each Sky Pyramid is armed with a large Sun-Fire beam at the apex, and can carry an entire regiment of troops. Sky Pyramids can damage objects on the ground by landing on them. The outer covering of a Sky Pyramid has DR 500.

Inca Magic

The Inca do not use Lorebooks as such, but rely entirely on personal instruction in transmitting their magical knowledge. Their magicians learn from one of four traditions.

The Lore of the Sun

The priests of the Sun are the keepers of some of the most powerful Inca magical knowledge, handed down from Manco Capac himself. Priests must be members of the Inca clan, and the organization is exclusively male. Inca rulers must master the Lore of the Sun in order to qualify for high positions in the government. The Lore of the Sun includes the familiar spells **Mastery of Levitation** and **Scrying**. It also includes the new lore of **The Blood Oath**, which compels the subject to fulfil a vow made to the caster; and **Memory**, which allows the subject of the spell to remember something with perfect clarity.

The Lore of the Mountains

When the Inca conquered the tribes of the Andes plateau, they were careful to preserve the existing magical traditions, now codified as the Lore of the Mountains. This tradition concentrates on practical spells: control of weather, communication with ancestral spirits, and protection from harmful magic. Students of the Lore of the Mountains are usually tribal magicians of subject tribes, but occasionally an Inca sorcerer will seek to learn their magic. The Lore includes the secrets of **Speaker to the Dead**, **Raise the Storm**, **Quell Nature**, and **Banish to Eternal Rest**.

The Lore of the Virgins

The all-female order of Nustas, or Sun Virgins, preserves Inca secrets of healing and longevity. They live in great convents in Cuzco, and are responsible for the health and well-being of the Sapa Inca and other nobles. They also provide magical healing to the common people, and know a great deal of ordinary medicine. Their Lore is taught at the great convent in Cuzco. The Lore of the Virgins teaches the student how to **Cast Out the Other**, **Conquer the Madness**, and **Strengthen the Life Bond**. It also includes the secret of how to **Share Life**, which allows a large group of magicians to allow themselves to age a short period, giving the lost time to the subject of the spell in the form of renewed youth.

The Lore of the Lines

The Nazca plain occupies an area just southwest of Cuzco, in an elevated valley separated from the sea by the coastal range. It is a vast level expanse of bare dirt and scattered tufts of grass. From the ground it appears to be nothing but

desert. But seen from the air the plain is marked by colossal figures of animals and vast geometric patterns. Perfectly straight lines stretch for miles across the plain. The lines are made by removing the darker topsoil to expose the lighter material beneath.

The Nazca lines are magical diagrams drawn by the Inca sorcerers, and serve as paths through space and time. The sorcerers can walk the lines to other worlds, other times and other dimensions. They visit the kin of the Inca beneath other suns, and bring back marvels from their journeys. Or they follow the paths into the past and future to see what has been and what will be. Some paths lead to other Earths, where history has followed different courses.

The magicians of the Nazca Plain are more like a New European magical Order than other Incan groups, selecting members on the basis of talent alone. Training is arduous, and many candidates fail. The Nazca Lines can act as magical paths to: **Dimensions Beyond the Faerie Veil, Other Planets of the Sun, Planets of Other Suns, and Other Times.**

Dork Tower!



Dork Tower!



Murphy's Rules



by John Kovalic

Murphy's Rules



Murphy's Rules



We Need to Talk

I suspect that, like most guys, there aren't many phrases that will fill my mind with more apprehensive dread than, "We need to talk." Whether uttered by girlfriends, teachers, or employers, there are few good situations that begin with those words.

So when Dennis and Kathryn -- my two players in the *World of Darkness: Dark Ages* campaign I took over temporarily from Dennis -- showed up at the game shop I was working at, their eyes showing unhappiness and concern, and my football-scholarship-declining friend Dennis said, "We need to talk," my heart sank.

But let me back up a bit.

For those of you unfamiliar with White Wolf's *Storyteller* system (at least, as far as it applies to *Dark Ages*), you are generally trying to roll 6's or better on a number of 10-sided dice equal to your ability. This works very well, at lower levels; an average person rolling two or three dice has a good chance of scoring a minimal success on average tasks, and a skilled person with six to eight dice has a very good chance of scoring a complete success, with phenomenal successes being feasible but rare.

The system breaks down when you have eight to twelve dice. In everything.

Both players were still using the same characters they had been for years, so they were quite skilled and powerful in just about everything. Most of the little black dots on the character sheet were blackened in. So crafting challenges for these characters was something of a nightmare:

"The Dark Beast Bl'aaaaal stands before you, its eyes blazing in fire and fury."

"I smack it with my magic dagger."

"<dice rolled> The atomized bits of the Dark Beast Bl'aaaaal flop to the ground in a moist pile. Um . . . uh . . . The Dark Beast's ten older, more powerful brothers suddenly show up . . ."

In addition, since the adventures took place around one kingdom (where one of the PCs was the ruling noble), the likelihood that insanely powerful -- and thus appropriately challenging -- threats could just wander up and knock on the castle door was fairly low.

So I crafted a different sort of adventure. I started with the supposition that, if these characters were as powerful and as known as they were, then anyone who would oppose them would be stark raving bonkers to do *anything* out in the open. So I created an adversary who was moderately powerful, but, most importantly, she was sneaky and smart. And she embarked on a long-range campaign of terror; the adventure series, as I had planned it, was scheduled for a year of game time. She would, slowly and methodically, try to unseat the PCs from their positions of power with fear and paranoia; you can't fight what won't make itself visible, and it doesn't matter *how* many dice you get to roll if the threat is non-obvious. And, ultimately, I expected the heroes to emerge, battered but triumphant in the face of this threat.

And, after a couple of sessions, the plot did, indeed, progress; the evildoer would act, the heroes would react. The heroes would respond to the plots with their plots, and life was generally very complicated for them. In fact, there was only one little problem.

I was succeeding.

And so, as I stood as a clerk peddling games, they approached. "We need to talk," they said. "We're not having fun."

I was succeeding too well. They weren't having fun, because it felt (perhaps not unfairly) that I was just messing with them. They weren't getting a sense of victory from the sessions, merely a draining relief at having endured the latest

round of assaults. "My real life is grinding and oppressive enough," one of them said, "I don't *need* this from my hobbies."

Mind you, this felt ironic to me. The players were doggedly creative and insightful in how they dealt with the various crises crafted by the adversary, and situations that were designed to be catastrophic were mitigated into mere annoyances. They were *winning*, in that they weren't being more than heavily inconvenienced by the most methodical, grandiose plots I could devise. And as a result, when they ultimately succeeded, they would be even stronger than before.

But they weren't having *fun*.

I've protested that this episode wasn't my fault, and, in many ways, I still don't believe it is. Mostly because there is no single thing where I look and say, "Ah-hah! That was the error in judgement; that's what I did wrong." But this situation arose because I was *too* good in bringing to life what my vision was.

On the other hand, at a core level it *was* my fault. Because I made an adventure where I would have wanted to play. As a player, I tend to favor the more "tragic" characters; it's nowhere near as satisfying for me to accumulate power/wealth/fame/happiness, as it is to start with these things, *lose* them, and then reacquire them (or not). The idea of redemption and returning to power is so compelling from many of my favorite movies and stories that I tend to favor that in my characters. (The difficulty in simulating this is also one of the biggest problems I have with most **D&D** games.) But my players don't like the same things I do, and I forced that view on them. And, in that way, I was wrong.

Fortunately my players came to me, and expressed their concern. (Unlike other campaigns from other GMs they've been in, where they would "accidentally" have other plans until the campaign collapsed.) As such, I was able to modify the campaign midstream, and fix things . . .

. . . more or less. My adventure series finished, and my players seemed pretty happy. The campaign ended shortly after I handed control back to Dennis. I like to think that wasn't my fault -- that I didn't deliver a fatal wound to that campaign -- but it's a nagging doubt.

And regardless of what kind of terror I was trying to instill in their characters, it was nothing like that caused by the simple utterance of, "We need to talk."

-- Steven Marsh

* * *

*Last week's answer: **Tale of the Comet** (for AD&D), **Book I: Cast & Props**, p 16.*

*(Three stars) "Vampire posers should be slain. That goes double for vampire posers who play RPGs. That goes *triple* for vampires who play RPGs and record lame chips based on their f***ing characters."*

* * *

Random Thought Table Homework: Preparation for Next Week's Column

Either visit our friendly [Online Entry System](#), or print this out and fill in words that fit the designation. Then wait for next week's column!

Piece Of Furniture

- Adjective** _____
- Noun** _____
- Profession** _____
- Proper Noun** _____
- Adjective** _____
- Emotional Adjective** _____

- First Person Verb** _____
- Adverb** _____
- Item Found In A Bookstore** _____
- Idiom** _____
- Liquid** _____
- Adjective** _____
- Adverb** _____

- Animal** _____
- Profession** _____
- Plural Noun** _____
- Adjective** _____
- Verb** _____

- Past Tense Verb** _____
- Astrological Body** _____
- Vehicle** _____
- Plural Animal** _____
- Small Objects Made Of Metal** _____
- Body Parts** _____
- Adjective** _____
- Noun** _____
- Number** _____
- Adjective** _____

Movie _____
Holiday _____
Vehicle _____
Adverb _____
Item Worn On The Body _____
Noun _____

Verb _____
Adjective _____
Adjective _____
Adverb _____
Adverb _____
Noun _____

Fashion Victims

An Adventure for San Angelo: City of Heroes

by Steve Kenson

Introduction

Fashion Victims is an adventure for the *San Angelo: City of Heroes* campaign setting for the *Champions* super-hero roleplaying game. With some minor adjustments it can work as an adventure for other super-hero RPGs, and conversion notes are included at the end of the adventure. Page references in the adventure are to the *San Angelo: City of Heroes* sourcebook, unless otherwise noted.

In the adventure, unusual circumstances bring an ordinary department store Mannequin to life, with the power to animate and control clothing of any kind. Although not the sort of villainous power most heroes are used to tackling, the Mannequin's ability proves sufficient to terrorize and blackmail the entire city when she turns everyone's own clothing against them. Can the heroes find and stop the Mannequin before San Angelo is forced to truly become "the Naked City"?

Fashion Show Nightmare

The adventure starts out with a fairly ordinary day at San Angelo Plaza, the largest and newest mall in downtown San Angelo (SA, p.122). The heroes are likely visiting the mall in their secret identities, although they might be there for any number of other reasons, such as appearing at a promotion to open a new store or a charity event hosted by the Plaza. Perhaps they're invited to the fashion show at the Plaza, or asked to cover it for a local newspaper or television station (for heroes with media connections). The open-air Plaza is a large two-by-five block area of downtown that hosts some 130 different shops, it is usually bustling with people, particularly teenagers and young families, and today is no exception.

A stage and runway are set up in the midst of the Plaza for a fashion show sponsored by the Plaza merchants association as a publicity event. Things seem ordinary enough, when the heroes hear a shriek of terror coming from backstage. A number of scantily dressed models (male and female) come running out, chased by a horde of animated clothing! The cries of terror are echoed from the nearby Fontaine's Department Store and patrons pour out of the store, chased by a horde of marked-down clothing bargains! Quickly, clothing throughout the plaza takes on a life of its own and attacks, with murderous garments pouring out of boutiques, factory outlets, and department stores. The heroes can do whatever they want to try and stop the wardrobe rampage, but they have a few problems of their own. Characters who have to change clothes to switch to their super hero identities suddenly find their discarded clothing rising up to attack them! Heroes also have to stop smothering clothes without harming any of the people tangled up in them. For details on the abilities of the animated clothes, consult Mannequin's stats at the end of the adventure. Tailor the scene (no pun intended) to fit your group and campaign. Some things you may want to consider include:

- Most of the clothing can't do much direct physical harm, but it can trip, smother, and choke victims. Clothing with built-in weapons (like a spiked leather jacket or the like) could manage to do some minor injury (equal to a 1/2D6 HKA).
- The clothes work together and there are a lot of them. As fast as the heroes destroy them, they keep coming. The clothes have to be burned or shredded (or the equivalent) in order to render them inanimate again.
- Feel free to throw in "specialty" clothing for a change of pace or comic relief: lingerie from Victoria's Secret, sporting goods, military surplus uniforms from G.I. Surplus, or fine suits and snake-like ties from Daley's for Men.

GMs looking to involve San Angelo NPCs in this scene can throw in some people from the media to cover the event. Some of San Angelo's wealthy might show up, like Bethany Waterhouse (SA, p. 188) and fashion models like Sasha from *Enemies of San Angelo* (p.54) can be in the show, which means her photographer Evan Beaumont (secretly the mutant illusionist Glamour) can't be far behind. Don't miss out on the chance to have some of the heroes' DNPCs on hand to endanger either.

Fashion Statement

Run the fight with the rampaging clothes as long as it's interesting. When the heroes clearly gain the upper hand or they are defeated, the clothes become inanimate once more. The local authorities quickly show up, followed closely by the local media. On-the-spot reporter Tobi Cantrell from KCTZ wastes no time in setting up a shot just outside the mall for live coverage of the event. Any player characters with jobs in the media shouldn't miss this opportunity for a scoop!

As Cantrell begins broadcasting live, the story is picked up on the television screens in the window of a nearby store, allowing the characters to watch the following:

"This is Tobi Cantrell reporting for KCTZ in downtown San Angelo, where it seems that the city is facing one of the most unusual happenings in a place where the unusual is often everyday. Less than an hour ago patrons here at San Angelo Plaza were attacked by a virtual army . . . of animated clothing. Dresses, shirts, and slacks marched off the bargain racks to commit acts of mayhem. The authorities have cordoned off the mall and appear baffled by the incident. As yet . . ."

Suddenly, a crackle of static fills the screen, when it clears the image is of a shapely woman, wearing the latest fashion, standing in a nondescript looking room. As she sashays closer to the camera, the characters immediately notice something odd about her; she's not real! The figure looks like a department store mannequin made of plastic, but she moves as if she were alive. A voice comes over the airwaves, although the figure's perfect painted lips do not move.

"Hello, fashion victims! I am the Mannequin. What you have seen at San Angelo Plaza is only the smallest sample of my power! If the city of San Angelo does not agree to pay me a ransom of 250 million dollars I will unleash a plague upon the city far worse than the outfits I've seen out on the streets. Just so you understand what you face, I will give you another example in 30 minutes. Remember it well and do not cross me, or else!"

Loose Threads

How the heroes proceed depends on whether or not they are sanctioned by the city government or not. Sanctioned heroes (like the Justice Foundation) are immediately contacted by the SAPD's Paranormal Affairs Office and asked to meet with Police Chief Jack O'Shea and Mayor Alex Martinez about the Mannequin's threat as soon as possible. The city officials offer whatever assistance they can to the heroes in tracking down the Mannequin and putting a stop to its threat.

If the heroes are not sanctioned, then they're largely on their own. They can rely on any contacts they may have, and they might even be able to convince the authorities to cooperate with them on this occasion, provided they're not wanted criminals themselves.

There are a number of clues the heroes can attempt to follow up on to learn more about the Mannequin and its plans:

- The transmission the Mannequin used to override the local television signals must have come from somewhere inside the city. A hero with Radio Hearing who thinks to do so during the broadcast can make a Perception roll. Success tells the hero that the signal originates northeast of the Plaza, but there isn't enough time to triangulate the exact location (unless the character is capable of teleportation or super-speed).
- Recordings of the Mannequin's transmission can be analyzed; they show the villain looks exactly like a type of

female mannequin manufactured for Fontaine's Department Store some years ago in a factory on the North Side. The mannequins haven't been made for over ten years, and the company that made them is out of business. The clothes the Mannequin wears look fairly new, however, and are currently carried by Fontaine's. The room she made the broadcast from doesn't provide any useful clues.

- Whatever the force that animated the garments in the Plaza was, it didn't register on any scientific instruments and left no apparent traces. As far as the police lab, Orion Labs, or the heroes can determine, it's just ordinary cloth, with no sign of what caused it to move and attack.

Fashion Revolution

While the heroes are tracking down clues as to her whereabouts, the Mannequin strikes again, this time using her power throughout the entire city to cause clothing to come to life and attack. This time she doesn't exclude clothing people are wearing, either. One full combat turn after the rampage begins the clothes people are wearing (including the heroes' costumes) take on a life of their own and join the attack! So the heroes have to contend with struggling against their own costumes while trying to contain the situation in the city. The GM should use the events in "Fashion Show Nightmare" as a guideline to create incidents for the heroes to handle during the fashion revolution. In addition to protecting innocent people and rounding up as many of the dangerous garments as possible, heroes can stay busy handling the numerous little catastrophes that happen when people's clothes go out of control: car crashes, fires, and so forth. Ideal sites for trouble include malls and shopping centers, Laundromats, charities, and anywhere else a large concentration of clothing and people can be found.

Super-hero costumes with special properties can become real dangers when they take on a life of their own, particularly battlesuits! If the GM desires, Cavalier or other members of the Justice Foundation (SA, p. 226) can show up to assist, only to fall victim to the strange effect, causing another problem for the heroes.

For an additional complication, some criminals (even some super-villains) might try to take advantage of the chaos and confusion to engage in some looting or other illegal activities. Alternately, some super-powered criminals might decide to team up with the heroes to put a stop to the Mannequin, especially if it might get them a reduced jail sentence or a chance at parole. Naturally, these "allies" are likely to turn on the heroes as soon as they get the opportunity.

The Mannequin's Lair

The Mannequin is hiding out in an abandoned plastics factory in San Angelo's North Side. The heroes can track her down using any of the methods mentioned above or some other idea of their own. If all else fails, they can convince the city to pay the ransom and covertly follow the animated clothes that come to collect it.

The Mannequin has stockpiled her lair with various clothing she can animate and a number of other mannequins, several of which look identical to her. She can move them by animating their clothes, and uses them as a distraction to allow her to escape, if need be. Keep in mind that the Mannequin isn't really alive and doesn't need to breathe or rest. Her lair is filled with inactive (but still functioning) plastics machinery, which can get switched on during the battle. It also has a lot of volatile chemical supplies, which can lead to a massive explosion if struck by a fire or stray energy blast. The factory is a maze of catwalks and heavy machinery, providing lots of places for cover, lots of things to pick up and throw and many places for clothes to hide and ambush the heroes.

The heroes have little chance of reasoning with the Mannequin, although they might be able to distract her if they've learned something about her origins (see her writeup at the end of the adventure).

All Tied Up

If the heroes capture the Mannequin, she appears to become inert, reverting to lifeless plastic and leaving the heroes to wonder whether they've really captured her at all. If the Mannequin escapes from the heroes (possibly by distracting them with the other mannequins, as described above) then she'll likely resurface later on, probably looking for revenge

against the heroes who thwarted her plans. Lastly, the fight in her lair could lead to the Mannequin's apparent destruction in a fire or explosion. The San Angelo Fire Department finds a cracked and broken plastic head, with a painted smile frozen on its lips. Is the Mannequin destroyed, or will she find some way to return?

The Mannequin

STR 20, DEX 18, CON 30, BOD 20, INT 13, EGO 15, PRE 20, COM 14, PD 10, ED 10, SPD 4, REC 10, END 60, STUN 0 (see powers)

Powers: Animate Clothing (20 STR Telekinesis, Area Effect Radius (15 range doublings), Selective, 0 END, Only Affects Clothing), Entangle (5d6, requires available clothing), Full Life Support, Damage Resistance (10 PD/10 ED), Takes No Stun (Automaton Power, Champions, p. 181), +20 Mental Defense.

Skills: CK: San Angelo 11-, KS: Fashion 13-, PS; Modeling 13- Disadvantages: Enraged when reminded of her former life, 11- (recover 11-), Distinctive Feature: animated mannequin (Concealable, Major Reaction), Hunted by the San Angelo Police Department 11-, Hatred of Normal People, Hatred of Beautiful (COM 16+) Women, Secret Identity, Vulnerability: x2 BODY from Fire & Heat.

Background: Fifteen years ago Ashley Schmidt defined the word "supermodel." She was on the cover of every major fashion magazine, did shows in Paris, Milan, and Rio, was in demand by dozens of companies to sponsor their products.

But the life of a high-fashion model took its toll on Ashley. She starved herself, had plastic surgery, used diet pills and other drugs to help her maintain her energy and her fabulous figure. In the end, none of it mattered, because Ashley, like everyone else, got older. And the demographics wanted models to appeal to a young audience. Ashley felt the end of her career looming before her. She was over the hill at 27.

Desperate, Ashley sank even further until she eventually died of a overdose of an experimental drug. After a flurry of news reports, she was quickly forgotten and replaced with a newer, younger model. But Ashley Schmidt wasn't ready to be forgotten just yet. Somehow her spirit lingered on in the world. She "awakened" in a store window in San Angelo, in the body of a plastic mannequin, her vehicle to gain revenge on those she blamed for her death. Store security never understood the mysterious "break in" where nothing was stolen except a display mannequin and some clothes. Especially when it appeared that someone broke the window from the inside.

Now Ashley Schmidt is no more, but the world will feel the revenge of . . . the Mannequin!

Animated Clothes

The clothes animated by the Mannequin's power have STR 20 and can move under their own power (usually by "walking" using their sleeves or legs or crawling otherwise). They have DEF 0 (except for articles made of stronger materials, like leather, which are DEF 1-3) and BODY 2-3. They have DEX 18 and SPD 4 (equal to the Mannequin's) for the purposes of taking actions. As unliving objects they have no STUN or other characteristics, nor are they affected by Mental Powers. Several different articles of clothing can attack en masse to create a sort of entangle with their combined BODY. They can also squeeze trapped victims, doing 4d6 damage per action.

Running "Fashion Victims" in Other Games

Gamemasters can adapt "Fashion Victims" for most other super-hero RPGs with little difficulty, whether using the San Angelo setting or not. The adventure is fairly four-color, so it's not well suited to settings like White Wolf's *Aberrant* or Alderac's *Brave New World*. Conversion notes for other super-hero RPGs are included below.

Mannequin in Blood of Heroes

DEX 5, STR 8, BODY 10, INT 5, WILL 5, MIND 7, INFL 8, AURA 6, SPIRIT 8, Initiative 18, Hero Points 50.

Powers: Animate Objects 10 (only clothing, Area Effect), Sealed Systems 20, Skin Armor 2, Skills: Artist (Model) 8,

Charisma 8.

Drawbacks: Severe Psychological Instability, Strange Appearance, Vulnerability (Fire, -2 CS)

Motivation: Pyschopath

Wealth: 0

Mannequin in DC Universe

Reflexes 4D [*Dodge* 5D, *Sneak* 5D], *Coordination* 4D, *Physique* 6D [*Resistance* 10D], *Knowledge* 3D, *Perception* 4D [*Artist (Modeling)* 8D, *Search* 5D], *Presence* 4D [*Charm* 7D, *Persuasion* 5D, *Willpower* 6D].

Advantages/Disadvantages: Acting Ability, Obsessive Tendencies.

Powers: Animation 12D (Clothes Only), Mental Shield 6D, Natural Armor 3D, Sustenance 10D.

Speed: 30

PDV: 3

Unarmed BDV: 2D

Phyique/lifting bonus: +3

Hero Points: 0

Villain Points: 4

Character Points: 10

Mannequin in Fuzion/Champions the New Millennium

INT 3, **WILL** 3, **PRE** 4, **TECH** 4, **REF** 4, **DEX** 4, **CON** 6, **STR** 6, **BODY** 5, **MOVE** 5, **SD** 12, **ED** 12, **SPD** 4, **REC** 12, **END** 60, **STUN** 0, **HITS** 25.

Powers: Animate Clothing (STR 6 Telekinesis, Area Effect Radius, Only Affects Clothing), Entangle (5d6, requires available clothing), Full Life Support, Armor (10 PKD & 10 EKD), Takes No Stun, Mental Defense: 20 pts.

Skills: Expert: San Angelo +2, Professional: Model +5, Wardrobe and Style +6.

Complications: Distinctive Features (10), Enraged when reminded of her former life (5), Enemy: San Angelo PD (10), Hatred of normal people (10), Hatred of beautiful women (10), Vulnerability: Heat & Fire (10).

Mannequin in Marvel Super Heroes Adventure Game

Strength 10X, **Agility** 7X, **Intellect** 5D, **Willpower** 6D, **Health** 17.

Powers: Animation (Clothes Only) 13 [Object Swarm], Ensnarement 13, Life Support 15, Psi-Screen +10. Skills: Fashion, Modeling.

Hindrances: Susceptible (Fire). Calling: Vengeance.

Castle of Frankentoon

(Starring Rabbit & Cowstello and The Three Pooches)

An Adventure for TOON

by Doc Cross

The Set Up

It's Halloween night and those intrepid (but not overly smart) reporters, Rabbit and Cowstello are just arriving at long abandoned Frankentoon Castle in search of a story concerning recent reports of strange goings on in the area. Meanwhile, at the back of the house, The Three Pooches (Hairy, Schmoe and Coily) are going in on assignment from their boss at the Ace Detective Agency. Their mission? Find out if wanted criminal Fingers Ravioli is hiding out here with his gang. If he is, arrest him!

Unbeknowst to any of the five nitwits now entering the castle, Fingers Ravioli and his gang ARE here, but they are being held captive in the dungeon by Count Dorkula and his monster pals. As if that wasn't enough, the strange goings on that have been reported have actually been the boys from a local fraternity (Tappa Kega Bru) getting part of the castle ready for their annual Halloween party.

The Animator can choose to have the Three Pooches meet up with Rabbit & Cowstello early on, or they can be kept apart until about halfway through the adventure. If they are kept apart, let the players of one group play NPCs while the other group is "onstage."

Running Gags

Several running gags appear in comedy horror movies, short subjects and cartoons. Here are a few.

- **The Changing Room:** This room has walls and floors that rotate to show one sort of room one way and another sort of room the other way. These changes are triggered by opening the door. Naturally, only one character will see the room as a torture chamber. when he shows it to his friends, it looks like a cozy parlor.
- **Slide To The Dungeon:** There are several trap doors and hidden panels in the walls. They all lead to a slide that ends in the dungeon where the monsters are. Pick one or two poor schmucks to constantly take this scarey slide.
- **More Fun With Hidden Doors:** Of course, the monsters will use secret doors to pop up wherever the Animator needs them. For that matter, so will the frat boys . . . all of whom are dressed up as monsters.
- **The Old Armchair Bit:** Simply put, someone sits in a big comfy chair and arms pop out and grab him, holding him in the chair.
- **Oh No, I'm Hip-Mo-Tized!:** Count Dorkula can and will hypnotize one or more of the characters, who will then spend several turns doing strange, stupid or funny things. Well, DIFFERENT strange, funny or stupid things from what they normally do.
- **Gee, Doctor, Are We Ever Glad We Found YOU!:** The kindly Doctor Jerkyl will be more than willing to help the characters. Of course, when he's alone with one of them, he'll turn in to the portly and psychopathic Mr. Wyde.
- **The Old Hallway Full Of Doors Bit:** This bit is a classic and we've all seen it 1,000 times, so you know the drill:) Draw a long hallway with at least 6 doors on each side. Once the monsters start chasing the characters in earnest, have the action move to this hallway and place one character and one monster behind each door. Toss something scarey into the rooms with the characters so they'll leave their rooms. Most likely they'll run in to monsters in the next room they choose. Much running from room to room and screaming and hilarity will ensue. At some everyone (monsters included) should step into the hallway, look at everyone else, scream and run back

into their room. Optional gag: A character leaves a room and passes himself in the hallway. Optional Gag 2: The door a character enters is not the one he leaves by. Sort of a random teleportation thing.

- **Guest Monsters:** Have a very ornate coffin show up in different rooms throughout the adventure. When a character opens it (or when it opens on its own) have a different Guest Star Monster step out and chase the characters for a turn or two. To find out who the Guest Monster is, roll on this table . . .

The Super Duper Guest Monster Table

- 11 Cthulhu
- 12 The Creature from the Black Lagoon
- 13 Any Politician
- 14 A Floating Disembodied Brain
- 15 The Phantom of the Opera
- 16 A Ghost
- 21 Martha Stewart
- 22 A Werewolf
- 23 A Weremoose
- 24 A Weremuskrat
- 25 Bigfoot
- 26 A Giant Spider
- 31 Godzilla
- 32 The Devil
- 33 Lots Of Snakes
- 34 A Giant Eyeball
- 35 A Crazy Psycho Killer
- 36 Regis Philbin
- 41 Bill Gates
- 42 Bride of Frankentoon
- 43 A Zombie
- 44 Giant Ants
- 45 The Invisible Man (you'll have to take his word on it)
- 46 King Kong
- 51 1d+1 Skeletons
- 52 The Blob
- 53 The Hunchback of Notre Dame
- 54 A Game Designer
- 55 An Alien (or maybe Sigourney Weaver)
- 56 A Great White Shark
- 61 The Iron Chefs
- 62 A 50' Long Alligator
- 63 Any WWF Wrestler
- 64 1d+1 Hideous Mutants
- 65 A Giant Turkey

Stuff

Here are a few items to have sitting around for the characters to find.

- **Hammer & Stakes:** Just the thing to spike old Count Dorkula with right? Wrong. The head of the hammer will fall off the first time anyone tries to use it and the stakes are rotten wood anyway.
- **Hair Remover:** Splash some of this on the Werewombat and his hair will all drop off instantly, leaving him standing there in his undies. He will then scream and run off, only to return 1d+1 turns later . . . hairy again and really angry.
- **Dynamite:** Just because TOON games are more fun when high explosives are around.
- **"Know Your Monsters":** This handy series of books tells the characters all they need to know about the various monsters. However, the books are so interesting that anyone reading them will fail to notice the monster creep up behind them and start reading over their shoulder . . . until they feel a tap on their shoulder and hear someone say "Turn to the next page"
- **A Black Cat:** This pussycat just loves to leap out of closets, put its tail out to be stepped on and do other heartstopping things to the characters. As with all cartoon cats, if it gets killed at all, it must be killed 9 times.
- **Tana Leaf Tea:** Any character who finds this cup full of tea and drinks it will become a regular Mummy magnet. The Mummy will chase them everywhere for 3d+2 turns.
- **Trick Guns:** The frat boys left several guns around, but although they LOOK real, they aren't. They are squirtguns, paintball guns, lasertag guns, cigarette lighters that look like guns or just capguns. The characters will find this out too late. Won't that be fun?

Cast Of Characters

Bud Rabbit

Bud is a 6 foot tall humanoid rabbit. He has slicked back hair and a little moustach. He's a pretty snappy dresser and prefers wearing suits. Bud thinks of himself as the brains of the Rabbit & Cowstello team and he IS smarter than Lou, but that's not saying much. A fencepost is smarter than Lou. Bud will never hesitate to let his little bovine partner do anything that smacks of dangerous or labor intensive work. He will also do his best to confuse Lou with convoluted arguments and word games, as in the famous "Who's On First" bit. Altho Bud will act brave, he will turn into a big coward once he finally learns that the monsters are real. Interestingly, and despite lou trying to show him proof, this will never happen until the game is at least half way over.

Bud carries a newspaper, a cigar and a reporters notebook and pen in his Back Pocket.

Beliefs and Goals: Get the story, but make Lou do any unpleasant or dangerous work. Pay no attention to him when he starts panicking. Keep clean and looking good in case we meet any ladies.

Hit Points: 12

Speed: 5

Muscle: 4

Break Down Door: 5

Climb: 4

Fight: 4

Pick Up Heavy Thing: 4

Throw: 6

Zip: 4

Dodge: 5

Drive Vehicle: 4

Fire Gun: 4

Jump: 5

Ride: 4

Run: 7

Swim: 5

Smarts: 4

Hide/Spot Hidden: 5

Identify Dangerous Thing: 8

Read: 6

Resist Fast-Talk: 10

See/Hear/Smell: 6

Set/Disarm Trap: 6

Track/Cover Tracks: 4

Chutzpah: 6

Fast-Talk: 10

Pass/Detect Shoddy Goods: 6

Sleight of Hand: 6

Sneak: 6

Shticks:

Incredible Luck: 7

Lou Cowstello

Lou is a 5 foot tall chubby humanoid cow. (well, actually he's a bull) He has dark hair and big brown eyes. He wears a suit that looks like he slept in it and a battered fedora. He is a loveable little guy, but not very bright. He tends to get scared easily and when scared he loses his voice for a few minutes. He can, however, still whistle very loudly. Lou knows that Bud takes advantage of him, but he still gives in to Buds fast talking. Like Bud, Lou is a sucker for a pretty face.

Lou carries a big reporters camera, a bottle of soda and a bag of popcorn in his Back Pocket.

Beliefs and Goals: Get the story and take lots of pictures. Be on the lookout for REAL monsters! Try not to let Bud confuse you.

Hit Points: 14

Speed: 3

Muscle: 3

Break Down Door: 3

Climb: 4

Fight: 4

Pick Up Heavy Thing: 4

Throw: 3

Zip: 2

Dodge: 4

Drive Vehicle: 3

Fire Gun: 3

Jump: 3

Ride: 2

Run: 4

Swim: 6

Smarts: 3

Hide/Spot Hidden: 4

Identify Dangerous Thing: 7

Read: 5

Resist Fast-Talk: 3
See/Hear/Smell: 4
Set/Disarm Trap: 3
Track/Cover Tracks: 3

Chutzpah: 3

Fast-Talk: 4
Pass/Detect Shoddy Goods: 3
Sleight of Hand: 3
Sneak: 4

Shticks:

Cosmic Shift: 6

Shmoe

Shmoe is the toughest and smartest of the Three Pooches, but he is still a moron. He's also not overly brave, especially around monsters. He is a 5'6" humanoid Boxer dog. He is dressed in a dark colored suit with a fedora hat. He is attempting to look like Sam Spade or Philip Marlowe. In fact, he looks more like a gangster than a detective. Shmoe slaps and whacks Hairy and Coily around, but they often whack him back. All three of the Pooches can take HUGE amounts of damage before they fall down.

Shmoe has a snubnose .38, a bottle of cheap hooch and a copy of the Racing Form in his Back Pocket.

Beliefs and Goals: Solve the case and become a famous gumshoe! The dames will really think you're hot stuff then! Keep an eye on those two knuckleheads, Hairy & Coily. Show them how a REAL private eye does things.

Hit Points: 50

Speed: 5

Muscle: 4

Break Down Door: 4
Climb: 4
Fight: 6
Pick Up Heavy Thing: 5
Throw: 5

Zip: 4

Dodge: 4
Drive Vehicle: 5
Fire Gun: 5
Jump: 4
Ride: 4
Run: 6
Swim: 5

Smarts: 3

Hide/Spot Hidden: 4
Identify Dangerous Thing: 5
Read: 4
Resist Fast-Talk: 4
See/Hear/Smell: 9
Set/Disarm Trap: 4
Track/Cover Tracks: 4

Chutzpah: 5

Fast-Talk: 5
Pass/Detect Shoddy Goods: 5
Sleight of Hand: 5
Sneak: 6

Shticks:

Bag of Many Plumbing Tools: 6

Hairy

A 5'6" humanoid Poodle, Hairy is dressed in a trenchcoat and slacks. Both are rumpled, since he is going for the "Columbo" style of detective look. He is smoking a cigar. Hairy is just as dumb as Schmoe, but thinks he is the brains of the bunch. He does have some talent for inventing things, but his inventions NEVER work right. Hairy is just as much of a coward as Schmoe or Coily are.

Hairy carries a flashlight, notebook & pen and a cup of hot coffee in his Back Pocket.

Beliefs and Goals: Solve the case and become a famous gumshoe! The dames will really think you're hot stuff then! Keep an eye on those two knuckleheads, Schmoe & Coily. Show them how a REAL private eye does things.

Hit Points: 50

Speed: 5

Muscle: 4

Break Down Door: 4

Climb: 4

Fight: 6

Pick Up Heavy Thing: 5

Throw: 5

Zip: 4

Dodge: 4

Drive Vehicle: 5

Fire Gun: 5

Jump: 4

Ride: 4

Run: 6

Swim: 5

Smarts: 3

Hide/Spot Hidden: 4

Identify Dangerous Thing: 5

Read: 4

Resist Fast-Talk: 4

See/Hear/Smell: 9

Set/Disarm Trap: 4

Track/Cover Tracks: 4

Chutzpah: 5

Fast-Talk: 5

Pass/Detect Shoddy Goods: 5

Sleight of Hand: 5

Sneak: 6

Shticks:

Bag of Many Baked Goods: 6

Coily

AKA "The Fat Bald Pooch," Coily is probably the dumbest of the three. He is a chubby and bald humanoid Labrador Retriever. He is dressed in a Sherlock Holmes outfit, complete with deerstalker cap. Of all the Pooches, Coily is the one most likely to do really strange things when he gets mad, frustrated or sees a good looking woman. By the way, Coily's name is pronounced the way it is due to his "New Joisy" accent. That also explains why he uses the woid, err,

word, "soitanly" instead of just saying "yes."

Coily carries a large magnifying glass, a pipe (it blows bubbles) and a copy of "The Hound of the Basketballs" in his Back Pocket.

Beliefs and Goals: Solve the case and become a famous gumshoe! The dames will really think you're hot stuff then! Keep an eye on those two knuckleheads, Hairy & Schmoe. Show them how a REAL private eye does things. Nyuck, nyuck, nyuck!

Hit Points: 50

Speed: 5

Muscle: 4

Break Down Door: 4

Climb: 4

Fight: 6

Pick Up Heavy Thing: 5

Throw: 5

Zip: 4

Dodge: 4

Drive Vehicle: 5

Fire Gun: 5

Jump: 4

Ride: 4

Run: 6

Swim: 5

Smarts: 3

Hide/Spot Hidden: 4

Identify Dangerous Thing: 5

Read: 4

Resist Fast-Talk: 4

See/Hear/Smell: 9

Set/Disarm Trap: 4

Track/Cover Tracks: 4

Chutzpah: 5

Fast-Talk: 5

Pass/Detect Shoddy Goods: 5

Sleight of Hand: 5

Sneak: 6

Shticks:

Bag of Many Strange Household Items and Live Angry Animals: 6

The Monsters

(We've only listed a short description, hit points and basic stats for the monsters, in order to save space.)

Frankentoons Monster

7 feet tall humanoid duck, greenish skin, bolts in his neck, not very fast, VERY strong and very scary looking. Not much of a talker.

Hit Points: 30

Speed: 3

Muscle: 11

Zip: 2
Smarts: 2
Chutzpah: 4

Count Dorkula

5'8" pale looking humanoid cat, wears formal evening attire and a cape, has the Hypnotize shtick at 7, controls Frankentoons Monster and The Mummy, speaks with a thick Transylvanian accent, wants to drink your blood.

Hit Points: 16
Speed: 6
Muscle: 6
Zip: 5
Smarts: 7
Chutzpah: 6

The Werewombat

6' tall humanoid wombat with big sharp teeth, howls alot, smashes furniture, a little sensitive about being one of the goofier types of lycanthrope, pretty well housebroken.

Hit Points: 22
Speed: 5
Muscle: 9
Zip: 4
Smarts: 4
Chutzpah: 5

The Mummy

6' 4" humanoid pig wrapped from head to toe in old moldy bandages, smells pretty musty, can't talk...just groans, afraid of fire, sometimes hums the Bangles tune "Walk Like An Egyptian"

Hit Points: 30
Speed: 4
Muscle: 8
Zip: 3
Smarts: 4
Chutzpah: 6

Dr.Jerkyl/Mr.Wyde

5'10" human/6' tall human, thin and aristocratic looking/burly and common looking with a really big butt, soft spoken and helpful/loud rude and psycho, carries a doctors bag/carries a big honking axe

Hit Points: 13/25
Speed: 4/6
Muscle: 4/7
Zip: 3/5
Smarts: 9/9
Chutzpah: 5/7

Write Your Own Random Thought piece of furniture_____

Warning! You may not want to read this week's until you've either used our [online data entry form](#), or printed and filled out the [list from last week](#)! These sorts of things happen when it's April Fool's Week.

If you filled out the entry form from last week, [CLICK HERE](#) to see your results.

Otherwise, just print out this sheet and fill it in!

* * *

To me, the essence of roleplaying is collaborative -- or *adjective*_____ -- storytelling, where the Game Master (alternately known as the *noun*_____, Master, the *profession*_____, or *proper noun*_____) begins with the outline of a(n) *adjective*_____ tale. He then introduces his *emotional adjective*_____ players, who, through their actions (or inactions), shape the narrative.

Now, I've always appreciated the incredible contributions my players make, no matter how much I may *first person verb*_____ about them at times. I've always said, "If I wanted to know *adverb*_____ what was going to happen, I'd create my own *item found in a bookstore*_____." (I also tend to say, "*idiom*_____" . . . but generally only after I've drunk too much *liquid*_____.) Most of my fondest gaming memories stem from either doing something completely *adjective*_____, or having something *adverb*_____ unexpected done to me.

- "I attempt to parlay with the *animal*_____."
- "We'll attack the *profession*_____; I think he's possessed by *plural noun*_____."
- "This is a pretty *adjective*_____ situation, but I've got an idea . . . Let's *verb*_____!"

Unfortunately, too many GMs I've *past tense verb*_____ with in the past don't seem to agree with my mindset. I distinctly remember one campaign in particular where our GM had this epic **D&D** adventure, which led through his own universe, the **Dark** *astrological body*_____ world, and the *vehicle*_____scape setting. All of this might have been a lot of fun, except his seven other players and I had *no* control over the plot. Led like *plural animal*_____ with *small objects made of metal*_____ through our *body parts*_____, we went from one encounter to another, escorting our super-powerful NPC to various encounters, where we'd fight the *adjective*_____ minions of the evil super-powerful NPC. We had no control over our *noun*_____; our purpose was to roll the dice to hit and for damage. At one point I said, "Why don't I bring my Apple II out here and, the next time you need me to roll *number*_____ dice of *adjective*_____ damage, you can just press the spacebar?"

Mind you, I've been guilty of this myself. I still remember the first game I GMed. It was in the mid-to-late-80's, when I'd gotten the *movie*_____ RPG Boxed Set for *holiday*_____. Unfortunately, I still didn't quite "get" what GMing was about; I basically *vehicle*_____ed them through one of the published adventures for that game. But at *least* I gave them the plot options that were presented in the adventure, even if I only did it *adverb*_____. We only played that one time, and I'm not sure if they had fun; I seem to recall one player spending a lot of time looking at his *item worn on the body*_____. But I had a *much* better idea of what I was doing when, five years later, I ran my first ongoing campaign of GURPS *noun*_____.

Anyway, the point of this installment is to realize that, in my mind, Gamemastering is (much like this particular column) a lot about letting go, and trusting your audience. Give them some control; let them *verb*_____.

results may be *adjective* _____ or *adjective* _____; the game may go *adverb* _____, or everyone might giggle *adverb* _____ once it's done. And hopefully, in the end, you'll be surprised by the *noun* _____.

-- Steven Marsh (*and You*)

* * *

I've had many people asking me more about the personal document binding system I mentioned [a few weeks ago](#). Well, it's called the GBC Personal DocuBind P50 (with names varying depending on who's site you're visiting). The best word to search for is "Docubind"; it seems to be mostly unique to this model. I've found it online at [Office Depot](#) and [Staples](#). \$59.95 seems to be a standard price.

I can continue to recommend it after a few weeks of using it. It's by no means perfect; the comb separating device uses plastic instead of metal teeth, and mine has already had one of them broken off. Fortunately this hasn't seemed to affect performance. It also lacks a means to latch it shut like many 3-hole punches; this only becomes a problem when, say, a paper clip unknowingly slips into the punching mechanism, jamming the thing up in the process. I wasn't aware of the problem, and so I was actually able to force it through . . . though I *definitely* recommend against that. But it still seems to work okay.

Finally, although the device claims only to be able to handle combs up to 1/2" thick (holding 90-100 sheets), I've actually gotten it to work with 3/4" and 1" thick combs, allowing documents 165 to 220 pages thick. It doesn't work *great* admittedly, but it works well enough, separating the comb enough to allow pages to be inserted slowly. But if you do use these larger combs, please be aware that it's a somewhat more permanent binding method, since adding and removing pages is a huge pain.

* * *

*Last week's answer: [reignofevil.com](#), for *Aberrant*, p. 14.*

*(Zero stars) "What is a roleplaying game?" [How many can **you** find, with appropriate variants?]*



Mummy: The Resurrection RPG

Published by White Wolf Game Studio

by Jim Comer, Robert Hatch, Jess Heinig, Conrad Hubbard, Steve Kenson and Richard Ruane



231 pages; \$25.95

Greetings and felicitations to you, my esteemed patron; and greetings as well to my fellow scholars.

A manuscript has recently come into my possession, one whose contents -- if they are to be believed -- suggest that great changes are afoot in our world. I say "if" because this manuscript, entitled ***Mummy: The Resurrection***, bears all the marks of a forgery. It appears to have been crafted to look like an Egyptian papyrus scroll, but my trained eyes recognize its more modern provenance. Nevertheless, I must admit that it is a very high quality forgery, whose script and illustrations are both well chosen and suitable to the subject matter at hand.

That subject matter is a type of supernatural being known as an "Amenti," taking its name from the Egyptian City of the Dead. The first section of the manuscript claims that a metaphysical disaster known as the "Dja-akh" has destroyed the City. The Dja-akh seems to be another name for the Sixth Great Maelstrom that destroyed the lands of the dead in recent months (assuming our Giovanni contacts are to be believed). Consequently, the souls who dwelt within Amenti were blown hither and yon, until they could find mortal vessels to inhabit. The combination of these two elements produces a new being, one that possesses the characteristics of each, but is greater than both. This being is one of the Reborn, as the manuscript also calls them.

The bulk of the manuscript is divided into eight distinct sections. The first of these describes the process by which one of the Reborn supposedly comes to be. The process (called "the joining" in the text) occurs when a recently deceased mortal soul encounters a fragment of an Egyptian spirit in the lands of the dead. This fragment (the "tem-akh") offers the mortal soul the chance to live again through its intercession. Together, the two elements of the new being seek out the priests of the god Osiris, who perform the Spell of Life in order grant "the Third Life" upon the new joined entity. If successful, this creates one of the eponymous mummies to which this manuscript is dedicated. The remainder of the first section describes the Amenti in detail, including their strengths, weaknesses and enemies.

To my mind, the second section highlights the forged nature of this manuscript, for it claims that the Reborn are divided into six types. These are the Kher-Minu (Tombwatchers), Khri-habi (Scroll Bearers), Mesektet (Vessels of Ra or Night Suns), Sakhmu (Spirit Scepters), Sefehi (Unbandaged Ones) and the Udja-sen (Judged Ones). Each type has an affinity for a form of "Hekau" or magic. Reading through this section, I was struck by its unoriginality, by which I do not mean the types of Amenti lack creativity - they do not. Rather, I am amazed that our forger should choose to model the Reborn so closely on the other supernatural beings of our world. The types of Amenti recall the clans among the Kindred or the tribes of the Lupines. The forger apparently believes these groupings are ironclad features of the cosmos and has thus dutifully reproduced them here -- his first major error in judgment.

I shall pass over the third section, for it includes material describing the specific attributes, abilities and advantages of mummies. This section also seemed highly derivative of other occult tomes, giving further support for my assertion of

its forgery. Moreover, the section is incomplete, referring the reader to other librams to obtain the necessary information to complete one's knowledge. Despite this, I believe the section provides sufficient information to gain a solid understanding of the reputed powers of the Reborn.

The fourth section describes the various Hekau paths in some detail. These paths, each of which is tied to a type of mummy (again, a derivative idea) are: Alchemy, Amulets, Celestial, Effigy, Necromancy and Nomenclature. I must confess I found this section extraordinarily intriguing. Whatever the origins of previous sections, the paths often showed a remarkable flair and originality. I have passed on copies to my colleagues among the Tremere to see if they can determine whether Hekau is simply a degenerate form of Thaumaturgy or a new kind of sorcery altogether.

The fifth section details the concept of "Ma'at," or balance, and how it affects the Amenti. The Reborn work to preserve Ma'at at all costs. These beings believe that the cosmic order has been overturned, which is why they have entered our world to correct the problem. This section does a fine job of elucidating this fundamental concept, as well as how it plays out in the existence of mummies. Again, the derivative nature of the manuscript shows: the discussion of Ma'at apes similar discussions of the various Paths we Kindred walk in our unlives. Nevertheless, there is much of interest in this section; I found myself impressed in spite of myself.

The sixth section is a gazetteer of the lands in which the Amenti are active, primarily the Middle East. The section is well written and provides plenty of food for thought. Small details here and there highlighted the inadequacies of my own geographical and cultural knowledge -- no small feat! Yet, the inclusion of many modern details made it certain that this manuscript is not at all ancient, for how could an Egyptian of the Old Kingdom speak of the Gulf War or the PLO? That the writer made no attempt to avoid these details boggles my mind and makes me question his reasons for dressing the manuscript in tattered finery elsewhere, since he obviously intended to tip his hand later in the tome. Curious indeed.

Section seven outlines the types of activities in which the Amenti engage. Thus, it's of prime importance to a would-be chronicler of their exploits. Although there is a remarkable diversity among these activities, the information is thinner than I would have liked. It also lacks examples in some instances -- an infuriating omission that made it harder for me to grasp the role these beings supposedly play in our world.

The eighth section complemented the previous one by describing the enemies of the Amenti. Everything from "bane mummies" (with many examples) to Lupines to the Followers of Set are detailed. Again, I would have appreciated more concrete information in places, but the large number and diversity of these antagonists impressed upon me the desperation of the mummies' existence. Their goal of restoring Ma'at cannot be an easy one.

At the end of the manuscript, there is a short appendix, written in another hand, that describes the mummies of cultures other than the Egyptians. I find the treatise intriguing for its breadth and willingness to look beyond the narrow confines of our Western culture and its antecedents -- a common flaw in treatments of this sort.

In the end, I am baffled. There are too many inconsistencies and borrowings for me to accept the notion of the Reborn wholeheartedly. Moreover, the idea that our world is inhabited by yet another type of supernatural being challenges even my credulity. Yet, I find that this manuscript, forged though it may be, contains within it much that is of value. I am not certain I could ever accept all that it says without reservation, but I rarely do that with any tome of this sort. Thus, I caution any who would read it to weigh its contents carefully before accepting it. Whether mummies do indeed exist as this work purports, I cannot yet say. However, I will suggest that Mummy: The Resurrection deserves study by anyone interested in the hidden world in which the Kindred exist.

I remain humbly and respectfully yours,

Dr. Douglas Netchurch
Childe of Trimeggian
Childe of Addemar
Childe of Lamdiel

Childe of Malkav

-- *As transcribed by James Maliszewski*

* * *

(Editor's note: Already this new volume has found itself researched far and wide; as such, a FAQ of findings and conclusions is available at <http://www.white-wolf.com/Games/Pages/MummyPreview/MummyFAQ.html>.)



JLA Sourcebook (for DC Universe RPG)

Published by [West End Games](#)

Written by Mark Barnabo, Jack Emmert, Matt Forbeck, Fred Jandt, Steve Kenson, Chris McGlothlin, Michee Rose, Aaron Rosenberg, David Ross, Jim Spivey & Nikola Vrtis



160 pp; \$21.00

The doorway from the teleporter banks slammed open, startling Green Lantern and Plastic Man. Orion and his Astro-Glider roared to a stop beside the round table that dominated the Justice League's Watchtower.

"Where is everyone?"

Plastic Man appeared to be sitting in a child's playground swing, suspended from support structures above the Watchtower's Hall of Justice. The coloring of the swing "ropes" gave away that they were, in fact, his own legs. "It's just us. The others are out fighting some planet-eating menace called G'Lactose or something like that."

Orion visibly tensed. "And why was I not summoned, if there is a battle to be won?"

"Maybe because they knew you'd mmmff!" A glowing green hand had materialized over Plastic Man's mouth.

"... ah, you'd be needed here to help us with any emergencies that came up," Green Lantern said. "Superman didn't think the entire League would be needed."

Orion thought this over for a moment and apparently found it acceptable: the cords of muscle in his neck relaxed.

"What's all that?" Green Lantern said, pointing to the stack of books clutched in Orion's arms. In reply, Orion dumped the books into an untidy pile on the table.

"*That* is trouble. We have a major security breach. Somewhere." Orion scowled.

"Hmm." Plaz picked up a copy. "JLA Sourcebook." He thumbed through it. "What's a 'roleplaying game?'"

"Don't ask," Orion said grimly.

" 'Chronicles the past, present and future of the World's Greatest Super Hero Team and their most dangerous enemies,' "
" GL read from the back cover.

"I like the cover," Plaz said, "but is my nose really that big?"

"Is that all you do -- look at the pictures?" Orion said.

"Don't knock it," Green Lantern put in. "Pictures are very important to communication." He leafed through the book. "The art here isn't bad. A little comic book-y, but what can you expect? The layout's all right, too. A little bland, with only the black, white, and rust . . ."

Orion watched with mounting disbelief as Plastic Man and Green Lantern continued to page through their copies.

"Chapters 2 through 5: JLA Year One. All right, the original Leaguers!" Plastic Man hooted with joy. "'Bout time people remembered there were heroes before ol' Red-Cape or Bats showed up. Why, I remember back when I was in the All-Star Squadron . . ."

"Good for you," Orion rumbled. Wars involving fewer than five planets failed to impress him.

"Er . . . right. Anyway. Members, Allies, Adversaries, Base & Equipment. Pretty decent coverage. Not everybody, but all the bigwigs. 'Most dangerous enemies,' like GL said. Say, here's the Doom Patrol. There was an odd bunch."

Green Lantern said, "The chapters on Young Justice are organized the same way: members, allies, adversaries, base and equipment. Seems pretty thorough. On the other hand, the kids haven't worked up the decade of history the League has."

"Speaking of which, Chapter 1 has a pretty good history of the League. Hey, lookie! The By-Laws! I'll have to read those someday . . ." Plastic Man thumbed his way toward the rear of the book. "Too bad there's nothing in more detail about the years between the founding of the League and now, other than that chapter."

"Chapter 15," Orion interrupted, "claims to be 'Updated and expanded rules for Manipulation Powers.' Rules? Chapter 16 is on android & robot creation -- as if making such things were as simple as scribbling notes on paper! Chapter 17 is advice for 'narrators' on handling high-power 'characters.' Do these people believe that this is some kind of game?"

"Check out the back." Plaz pointed into chapter 18. "An adventure running the range of Justice Leaguers from the past & present and into the future. How would *they* know? Sounds like a crock of crud to me."

"Oh, wait. I get it." Green Lantern closed his copy. "When I was in high school, I always had people coming to me wanting me to draw pictures of their characters for these games like *Catacombs & Creatures*. This must be something like that, except the players are playing . . . us. Weird."

"Hmm." Plastic Man frowned. "Wonder Girl's mom is named Helena. Or is it Helen? Seems they can't make up their mind."

Green Lantern nodded. "Yeah, bugs like that always turn up. Names misspelled, too many dependent clauses, stuff like that. I've seen worse, but I've seen better, too. This one has a decent index -- a lot of these books wouldn't even bother."

Plastic Man snorted. "Here's what they say about me: 'Race: Human (well, sort of...)' Hmph! I'll show 'em who's human... and what's a Villain Point? 'Cause I seem to have one."

"Whatever." Green Lantern put the book down down and looked at Orion. "I don't really see anything to worry about. Celebrities get this all the time. A measure of fame & fortune, and suddenly there are dozens of unauthorized books each claiming to tell the one true story of that celebrity's life and works."

"This," he gestured to the pile on the table, "looks basically okay -- nothing grossly wrong or offensive. From what little I know about these games, the write-ups all look to be fair and accurate."

"Perhaps too accurate." The warrior from New Genesis picked up the discarded book and handed it back. "Look more closely at chapters six through ten."

Green Lantern sighed and opened the re-offered book. "Uh-huh. It's the current League, organized the same way."

Current members. Current Former Members, that's new. Allies, Adversaries, Base & Equipment. So?"

"Look again." *Orion's being unusually patient*, Plastic Man thought. *His mother box must be working triple overtime.*

Green Lantern did so. "So? It's us." Then he did a double-take. "It's *us*. And that's my real name!"

"Mine, too!" Plastic Man turned a page. "Batman is really Bruce Wayne the billionaire? I'd never have guessed! And why do Batman and me have Villain Points, whatever they are, when that murderous Huntress doesn't?" Another few pages. "And Superman is Clark Kent? Incredible!"

Green Lantern murmured, "This section on Adversaries could come in handy. Imagine being able to reliably know your foe's limits and weaknesses in advance. On the other hand, this report on the Watchtower is far too accurate for my comfort. And if we can read about the bad guys, they surely can read about us. If this book fell into the wrong hands, we'd be in serious, serious trouble." Green Lantern put the book down. "I apologize, Orion. You were right. This might be the greatest threat the League has ever faced."

Orion nodded. "I acquired as many copies as I could find, but we cannot know how many more of these exist."

Plastic Man unwrapped his legs from the ceiling and dropped lightly to the floor. "Okay! So we're off to save ourselves from the world! Who'd've thought it?"

"Plaz?" Green Lantern's voice was calm and even.

"Yes?"

"Shut up."

-- *Transcribed by Bob Portnell*



Passion Play (Live-Action Rules for the Fading Suns Universe)

Published by [Holistic Design](#)

Written by Bill Bridges, Jeff Brown, Gary Glass, Mareen Goebel, Bill Maxwell, Nikki Johnson-Maxwell, Kim Scott, Trevor Valle, Dave Vasquez



232 5-1/2"x8-1/2" pages; \$14.95

Philosophus Gandius Mathews,

The end is nigh! The Eskaton approaches, and the teeming millions whose souls flicker dim are not unlike the fading of the stars; their hopes for salvation dwindle as the embers of their inner potential flames fade fast. Soon all will end in darkness.

But not, it seems, today.

Perhaps Thursday. The end times will be nothing if not unpredictable, even if going so far as to be predictable to further reinforce the need for unpredictability.

In the interim, my studies continue. And in my travels I have discovered a new volume called *Passion Play*. Incredible as it sounds, this work seems designed to allow others to simulate the lives of nobles, priests, and freemen, through "live-action roleplaying."

The end is nigh.

The first chapter details current events in our world. I am curious who would find the information in these 26 pages useful; for, who does not know about our lives in the dawn of the sixth millenium: the rise of the nobles, the power of the church, the enemy barbarians threatening to invade the boundaries of the jumpweb Emperor Alexius Hawkwood has struggled to hold together? It serves as an excellent primer, to be sure, if one were to have amnesia or other demons of the mind. It also sets the mood for the remainder of the tome, providing the background information necessary. I also fear the barbarian Vuldrok or Kurgans may glean entirely too much useful information from even this rudimentary parser.

The second chapter, titled "Rules," provides the framework for this game to allow the impersonation of others. For, who without a lifetime of training could hope to duplicate the knowledge of your typical Li Hilan noble or Amalthean healer? Yet these rules seem to allow for such masquerades. The system itself is simple; there are three Characteristics (Body, Mind, and Spirit) rated from 1 to 5. There are also similarly rated skills, and Metiers -- in essence, specializations, like "Strength" for Body -- that can add to the Characteristics and Skills. Thus under normal circumstances one might have a rank of 1-10 to do an action. Actions themselves are ranked 1-10 or more, where 10 or more is a Herculean effort.

The system, such as it is, compares these; if the action is ranked at the level of ability the impostor possesses (or less), it succeeds. Otherwise it fails. Thus if you have a Body of 4, and you need 3 levels of success, you achieve it. If you only have a body of 2, you fail.

There are numerous supplemental systems that enhance this basic one. For example, Twenty Questions represents wheedling true information out of another, and their efforts to resist. Contracts represent binding exchanges between two people, like offering to vote in another's favor in exchange for his voting your way in the future. And Wyrd represents manipulating the tides of fortune, with good and bad luck. Wyrd is controlled through the use of standard cards, where each suit is a different effect. And for those who might complain of the lack of uncertainty in the task resolution system, there is an optional rule at the end of the tome that provides a random element.

The next section details "Characters," as if such sinful impersonations could be explained through the hand-waving used by actors and other voidbound souls. These fifty-odd pages comprise the largest section. Viewed objectively (as most all knowledge should be, even that considered wicked by the Orthodoxy), this section is remarkably thorough and versatile while retaining their ease of comprehension. It should be quite possible to create a detailed and interesting impostor, with backgrounds, history, motivations, and flaws. Of particular note are the essays at the end of this book, where insight is provided to more fully flesh out the methods of mimicking your roles, and dressing in an appropriate manner without spending many firebirds. Disgraceful, and *truly* a sign that the end times approach.

Chapter Four, entitled "The Will and the Way," details combat, cybernetics, and, most distressingly, the Occult. Instructing serfs in the ways of picking up arms and dueling -- even in mock fashion with each other -- is remarkably distressing. And to inform the masses of the potentials and pitfalls of religious rituals and psionic abilities alike? A recipe for disaster, where the ignorant are eggs. (That is what we call a metaphor, Philosophus . . . I have yet to discern truth in the rumors of the Vao's energy poultry experiments.)

The fifth chapter, entitled "Drama," details how to make this faux world of nobles, priests, and freemen teem with verisimilitude. The advice here, forbidden though it is, is nonetheless sound, and should prove fruitful for both neophytes and members of the Masque Guild of professional performers. There are also interesting rules that should enable the "gamemaster" (as the leader of such a group is called) that enable the course of the saga to be shaped through the player's actions. For example, the playing of a Death's Door Wyrd card is of great import, and moves the world towards a more sinister destiny. There is much here of interest, and I must confess when I may . . . though I hope some knowledge of light may be gleaned from this morass of banned knowledge.

Chapter six, "Life in the Known Worlds," expands on information presented in the first chapter, and presents a detailed overview of the Known Worlds. For attempting to comprehend the various forces that shape our world this guide will prove useful; however, for those who would seek more in-depth knowledge to impersonate another, they will need to seek out additional forbidden tomes of knowledge. Nevertheless this section is a good starting point for these sinners. In addition, plot elements and story ideas are presented, providing many opportunities for the gamemaster.

The book ends with a map of the Known Worlds, a summary of the tables and other information, and a "character sheet" to record the exacting specifications of one's descent into hubris.

There are no illustrations within the book, though there are numerous daguerreotypes of those dressing in improvised but nonetheless convincing looking garb. There is incredible skill to behold here, wicked though the subject is.

I have consulted with a Reeve associate, Director Wattson; he has informed me that much of the material in this tome is very similar to another sinful work entitled *Fading Suns*, also apparently known in some secret societies as the "main book" (with whatever sinister implications *that* implies). This volume apparently details another altogether different form of game. Wattson has informed me that the material in these two works is quite compatible, and with minimal effort either could be used to augment the other. There *are* differences, however . . . most notably in the flavor of the simulation presented owing to the differences in the task resolution in the two games. Combat in the "live-action" game is much faster and more decisive than that in the "tabletop" version, while the role, power, and rarity of Wyrd in both games is wildly different. But in all they are more similar than dis-

In all, this work does that which it sets out to do: it provides a portable encompassing framework to indulge in

forbidden impostory, and provides both real-world information of the factions involved, as well as practical advice for how to make the charade work. It's biggest shortcoming, in my mind, is its basic resolution system, which seems quite prone to abuse. But there *are* methods built in to ensure things go smoothly, and in the hands of a competent "gamemaster" with fair-minded sinners, this should provide the framework for much Church-disapproved merriment.

And if this book grants others with the skills necessary to impersonate nobles and churchmen, ready to infiltrate the factions towards their own ends, can there be any doubt as to the likely outcome?

It's almost Thursday, and the end is nigh.

Your servant, striving to remain graced in humility,

Novitiate Randolph Muir
Priest of the Eskatonic Order

--Transcribed by Steven Marsh

The Hunting of the Hunting of the Snark: An Agonetta in Six Fitlets, With Apologies To The Reverend Dodgson

1. A Student of matters mystic once read the ineffable works of Lewis Carroll.
 2. And, being somewhat confused at the time, decided to try and find a Snark.
 3. Meditation can do this sort of thing to unbalanced personalities."
- Count Zeno the Zetetic, *The Book of the Arrow*, 1:1-3

"Just the place for a Snark!" the Transmitter exclaimed,
As the April Fool's deadline impended;
As his regular Muse had succumbed to the booze
Leaving columnists' mornings upended.

The Transmitter panicked, then cried with delight,
"Thank the Reptoids I'm never too clear!
If I'm over a barrel, I'll just rip off Carroll,
Whose Snark poem lurks around [here](#)."

"I was walking on a hillside, alone, one bright summer day, when suddenly there came into my head one line of verse - one solitary line -- 'For the Snark was a Boojum, you see.' I knew not what it meant, then: I know not what it means, now; but I wrote it down: and, sometime afterwards, the rest of the stanza occurred to me, that being its last line: and so by degrees, at odd moments during the next year or two, the rest of the poem pieced itself together, that being its last stanza."
-- Lewis Carroll, "Alice on the Stage"

On July the eighteenth (John Dee's birthday, you know)
The Snark scabbled through this dimension.
And impressed on L. Carroll a name darkly feral
Of which "Boojum" was but an extension.

(A similar cognomen, of unseemly omen
[H.P. Lovecraft](#) would hear in his sleep.)
But the Snark found its Door (eighteen-seventy-four),
As an Irishman vampirized sheep.

"The Hunting of the Snark, by Lewis Carroll. Valuable to those who understand the Qabalah."
-- Aleister Crowley, *Magick in Theory and Practice*, "Curriculum of A.'.A.'"

Was it those depredations that prepared the equations
For the Snark to emerge in his mind?
Kabbalistically numbered, the Snark is eight-hundred,
Or "boundary" (three-thirty), we find.

"Snark" might be (with terminal Samekh) 570
The number of Moloch -- what fun!
(But a tad rearranged, Moloch can be changed
To "angel" -- five-seventy-one.)

While removing the zero, from Moloch the Snark,
Gives you Boojum -- Beth-Wau-Gimel-Wau-Mem
In the numbers of Heaven, that makes fifty-seven
Or "fishes," or "chaos," or "rim."

"[S]tudy that darkest problem of metaphysics, the borderland between reason and unreason, and the nature of the most erratic of spiritual forces, humour, which eternally dances between the two. That we do find a pleasure in certain long and elaborate stories, in certain complicated and curious forms of diction, which have no intelligible meaning whatsoever, is not a subject for children to play with; it is a subject for psychologists to go mad over."

-- G.K. Chesterton, "The Library of the Nursery"

It's here, to be eerie, I should mention the theory
That the Snark was [the Ripper](#), as well.
But there's hints in the chanty reminiscent of Dante
And the horrible deepness of Hell.

The Bellman's large map is of unbroken white,
Arthur Gordon Pym's vision symbolic,
This cartography Snarked thus depicts the [Antarctic](#),
where [Nazis](#) and Elder Things frolic.

But what if the Snark does mean Nothing At All,
Deus Et Nihilo Ex Machina?
It's the cousin and heir to What Should Not Be There,
Be it shoggoth or [elf](#) or mujina.

"Hunting for the Holy Grail is rather like hunting for Lewis Carroll's Snark. It comes in many shapes, it leaves many trails, and, if you find it, the only certainty is that it won't be what you were looking for. Like the hunters in Carroll's poem, you'll discover that the Snark was a Boojum after all."

-- Andrew Sinclair, *The Secret Scroll*

Could the Snark perhaps be the Philosopher's Stone?
Such conundra are endlessly fussed.
The answer, occulted, from the tomes I've consulted,
"It depends on the sources you trust."

Quercetanus gives twelve, Zosimos fifteen,
As the stages within the Great Work.
Paracelsus gives seven, to Norton's fourteen,
And both call Zosimos a jerk.

So if you'll trust Ken, I'm sure someone's said ten,
(It's the number of sephiroth spheres)
Which nicely equates to the number of mates
Which the Bellman so capably steers.

The vanishing Baker must be sublimation,
The Banker nigredo as well,
With further allusion, and minor confusion,
I'm sure that the rest parallel.

"In answer to your question, 'What did you mean the Snark was?' will you tell your friend that I meant that the Snark was a Boojum. I trust that she and you will now feel quite satisfied and happy."

-- letter of Lewis Carroll, 1897

So the Snark may be demon or vampire or Grail
Or alchemically-perfect azoth,
Or Joy, or Surprise, or the Lord of the Flies,
Or Lovecraft's blind god Azathoth.

But it misses the boat saying the Snark's a qliphoth,
[Ultraterrestrial](#), or sidhe,
It's the act of predation as [bisociation](#).
For the Snark *is* a Boojum, you see.

Murphy's Rules



by John Kovalic

Murphy's Rules



Murphy's Rules



Dork Tower!



Dork Tower!



Designer's Notes: GURPS Discworld Also

The Not-Too-Gentle Art of Parody

by [Phil Masters](#)

Writing [GURPS Discworld](#) a couple of years ago was enormous fun and a privilege, but it was also, inevitably, a somewhat *constrained* process. I was looking at a world which had been developed, in depth and width, over twenty-odd novels; my primary job in that book was simply to convert it to **GURPS** game mechanics. [GURPS Discworld Also](#) is a slightly different beast.

Designer's Notes: GURPS Discworld Also

It's partly an update and expansion of the stuff that appeared in the first book, of course, mentioning plot events from recent novels (such as the attempted vampiric take-over of Lancre, from *Carpe Jugulum*), providing rules and numbers where necessary (such as the skills involved in operation of the new semaphore system that first appears in *The Fifth Elephant*), and sometimes simply providing New Game Stuff (such as racial packages for assorted minor sentient species and beings). It also allowed me to apply some newer **GURPS** concepts to Discworld games, like the whole chapter of character templates (which, incidentally, are also mostly applicable to other fantasy games).



However, the greater part of the book consists of an extended treatment of the Discworld *as a venue for games*. Not that the first book didn't cover that, of course, and from what I've heard, plenty of people have been using it for RPGs just fine. But in this book, I wanted to play with some variations. The Disc *is* a world, and I wanted to show a little more of what could be done in that direction, working outwards from the (wonderfully rich and varied) material in the novels.

The Tools to Hand

One big trick I used was parody. The Discworld novels are a lot *more* than parodies -- they're social comedies, action-adventure stories, novels of character, and sometimes good old-fashioned slapstick farces -- but parody and satire have been recurrent themes throughout the series. The range of targets has been wide, from British public school stories through RPGs and revolutionary politics to Hollywood and rock and roll, and the tone has ranged from the affectionate to the savage.

So I felt entirely justified in running with this idea. The real world is pleasingly full of stuff that can be parodied, and Terry Pratchett hasn't got around to all of it yet, so I had a good range of targets. I paid particular attention to the games industry; aside from being familiar to the potential audience, these sorts of thing can make for interesting games in themselves. For example, I think that the idea of playing Cart Wars in EcksEcksEcksEcks is not only a logical extension of something first seen in *The Last Continent* and a modest joke about something close to home round here, but also a viable game on its own account (and an interesting use for the **GURPS Vehicles** design system, and proof of its flexibility).

But just as the Discworld novels work as novels, not *just* as parodies, I wanted the campaign outlines and scenarios in this book to work as "pure games." Indeed, the town of New Smarlhanger isn't a parody of very much, but is (I hope) a place where good games can be set, and "Walking the Spiral" is mostly an excuse to take a bunch of PCs round as much of Ankh-Morpork as possible (with, admittedly, some gags about the computer business). Is Port Duck a parody of two popular (but deeply parody-worthy) types of movies, run together, or is it a place where two different types of swashbuckling adventure story can be played out, more or less straight? That's up to the people who play with it, though I like to think that they'll be able to manage both, often in the same scene.

And there were always questions of getting the *flavour* right. Pratchettian parody is subtle, and often has a *point* (and a kernel of realism, of a particular sort). Anyone can crack a few feeble puns on the names of people or things, or make parody versions of clever characters stupid or big things small, but good comedy should do more than that. When I created a tough, swashbuckling renegade cop for Port Duck, I could have made him clumsy and inept, but that would hardly have been plausible from the plot point of view, so I made sure that he was every bit as tough and agile as he needed to be. However, I then asked myself what an objective observer might think of a swashbuckling renegade cop, and what his reasons for this behaviour might be. I came to the conclusion that, well, he certainly *looks* like a vain poseur. Is that the whole story about him? Maybe . . . But the book has to leave a few questions open.

It also became clear that some subjects might work better than others. The Discworld novels may go after a wide range of targets, but they do have their own consistency, and their fans have quite strong feelings about anything that compromises their integrity. I tested this a little with one long sidebar I included in my first draft. It's a parody of a particular, well-known bit of pop culture (and, perhaps, a tribute of sorts, with a bit of irony). When it hit playtest, some people liked it; others reacted quite strongly against it, clearly feeling that it *wasn't Discworld*. I could, still, argue the point in its favour, but in the end, it had to come out. I'm including it here, though, partly because it *does* seem to work for some people, partly as a demonstration of how to take a familiar idea and give it a Discworld twist, and partly as an example of the sort of thing that stretches the limits.

(I should emphasise, though, that while much of the book is not "official Discworld" -- as I said, it's an exercise in taking ideas into new territory, for the sake of gaming, and indeed some of it may be superseded by future novels, if Terry so chooses -- this particular idea is doubly unofficial.)

The Mysterious Five

The Mysterious Five are an NPC group who can be encountered almost anywhere on the Disc, mostly as a red herring, although they do come with a full-scale plot buried in their background. There are five of them (if you count the dog, which seems somehow obligatory), travelling in a garishly-daubed cart. They may at first appear to be Ecksian backpackers (especially the two blond ones), but their lack of distinctive accents gives the lie to this.

[Designer's Notes: GURPS Discworld Also](#)



The truth is that the group is a by-product of wizardly eccentricity. The solitary wizard in question was experimenting with permanent variations on the Morphic Tweaking spell (p.DII140-141), and took, as an experimental subject, a female hamster who he had decided was too undignified to appoint as his familiar. He transformed it into a semi-human female form; the only flaw in the result was that the hamster, having been rendered more intelligent by the spell, is now convinced that she is a genius. (She is actually IQ 7, but with Overconfidence.) She has picked up a working grasp of certain clichés from somewhere, and thinks that all geniuses have poor vision; at her insistence, the wizard even gave her a pair of eye-glasses to "cure" this, but they actually distort her perfectly adequate eyesight (giving her -3 to vision-based rolls). The wizard kept her around his tower as a harmless if useless amusement, naming her "Wilma" (after his sister, who he had never liked).

Then the tower was attacked by a group of "heroes"; a hulking blond barbarian, an enchantress, and a fairly benevolent werewolf, who had heard rumours and taken him for an evil wizard. (He wasn't evil, just misunderstood.) The wizard may have been mad, but he was ready for this sort of thing, and dropped a net and some stunning spells on them when they were half-way up the first staircase. He wasn't sure what to do with them, but decided to start by trying some experiments on the werewolf, splitting its human and wolf aspects into separate beings. However, each aspect retained some odd features; the human part seems barely human, and what should have been the wolf part, being heavily influenced by its human-socialised nature, turned into, well, a dog (looking to have about equal parts Great Dane, Labrador, wolfhound, and spaniel).

Then Wilma, who had taken a liking to the prisoners, tried to free them. The wizard, irritated by this, decided simply to throw all five out. In order to avoid having them come back, he cast a series of mind-control spells on them, telling them "Forget all about me. In fact, forget all about magic. Tell yourselves there's no such thing. And forget this heroic nonsense. Just go away and play tourists or something."

The Five did indeed forget everything he told them to, and took up the lives of wandering tourists, complete with new names. When Wilma unlocked the cell holding the barbarian, on whom the wizard had already cast some befuddling spells, she said "You're freed now," and as a result, he now answers to "Freed," that being the nearest thing to a name that anyone's offered him. He is ST 18, HT 13, and Attractive, but displays no other significant skills, having been obliged to forget everything about the heroism that was previously his entire life. And the former enchantress, her old, nigh-unpronounceable name now shortened to "Narcissa," has likewise forgotten her former array of supernatural powers (though she remains the most organised of the group).

As for the two beings who were once one werewolf, they continue to hang around together, sensing a kinship. The near-human part is known as "Scruffy" (because he is), and the canine part is called Scruffy Too. The wolf's barely-controlled hunger for flesh has been transmuted into a shared tendency to snack at every opportunity, and a willingness to try anything edible once, including hallucinogenic fungi. That aside, Scruffy can be treated as an Unattractive but otherwise average male human, while Scruffy Too combines un-canine intelligence with all-too-canine curiosity and clumsiness; consider him to have IQ 7, DX 10, Move 7, and the Insatiably Curious (p. CI89) and Total Klutz (p. CI82) disadvantages.

The Five's biggest problem, apart from their lack of useful skills and general cluelessness, is their conviction that magic, and even things like perfectly normal trolls, *don't exist*. Faced with any situation or problem involving the supernatural, they charge in, announcing "You can't fool us," and try to expose the conjuring tricks or pull the "masks" off the monsters. They are thus likely to require a certain amount of saving by less deluded folk.

It would take truly superhuman magical powers to fully restore their old selves. However, optionally, at times when they are out of sight of any PCs, their old adventuring skills might surface temporarily (and unconsciously). PCs might walk into a room and discover carnage wrought by Freed's combat skills, Narcissa's magic, or either of the Scruffies' lycanthropic fury. Wilma may just temporarily disappear, leaving only a confused-looking hamster. This could become the basis for a running joke, or a particularly warped murder mystery. (Don't forget that some of these people *did* used to be professional killers . . .)

Storyteller System Secondary Abilities Redone

by J. Edward Tremlett

Secondary Abilities for White Wolf's *Storyteller System* are one of those odd mechanical things which can create undue complexity while masquerading as a simplification. Like Merits and Flaws, they are totally optional; they aren't needed for the *Storyteller System* to work, and are simply meant to add more depth to a character's background, should the Storyteller allow their use in her game.

Some players might want to take dots in Secondary Abilities because they sound intriguing, or seem as though they might come in handy. The fact that they're supposed to be less expensive at character creation also attracts players to them. But while such Abilities can be useful, "lesser" skills or refinements to have in your game, sometimes they just become wasteful quirks that might see too much use, too specialized a use, or no use at all.

As currently presented, Secondary Abilities can cause a bit of a muddle when used on the same playing field as ordinary ones. The purpose of this article is to present a way that these Secondary Abilities could be used so that they add to the game, rather than adding to player and Storyteller confusion over which Ability to use when. It will also cover suggestions on how to get them during character creation, and how to raise them with Experience.

The Secondary Dilemma

On any *Storyteller* character sheet, there are usually a total of 30 Abilities listed, broken down into Talents, Skills, and Knowledges. These 30 Abilities are considered "regular" Abilities: ones which are considered the most useful, or at least the most likely to be used, by the characters in that game. Most of the examples of rolls for various feats or actions given in the main rule book for a Storyteller game (often called the Core Book) utilize those regular Abilities.

Various Players Guides, supplements, "Splatbooks" and other such materials for the games often list other Abilities that characters could have. These are what we mean when we speak of Secondary Abilities. There are some Secondary Abilities which, quite clearly, can only be used for certain purposes, such as Archery for using a bow and arrow, Pilot Airplane for flying a turbo prop, Psychology for getting someone to talk about their mother, and so on.

And then there are Secondary Abilities which are either replacements for, or refinements of, the regular Abilities. These could be used instead of regular Abilities for the same, basic rolls given in the core book. For example, a player could roll Dexterity + Climbing to have her character climb a wall, rather than rolling Dexterity + Athletics that's prescribed.

It's suggested that Secondary Abilities be less expensive than regular Abilities, and this is another reason some players choose them. After all, if you're playing a paid interrogator for the Prince, why take two dots in Intimidation (for Manipulation + Intimidation rolls to torture someone) when you could pay the same amount to have four dots in the Torture Secondary Ability? It seems a lot more advantageous, at least while creating the character.

But then, when it comes time to raise their Abilities through Experience Points, players might not be sure what to do. Do they raise a regular Ability, which can be used to do a whole range of things, or raise the Secondary Ability which allows one to do one, specific thing very well? It works fine if the Secondary is higher than the Regular from Character Creation, but sooner or later the character's stats might raise them both to an even level, and the question remains as to where to go from there. Do you raise one and abandon the other (leading a Storyteller to ask why the other was taken in the first place) or raise them both in tandem (which is expensive and kind of silly)?

There's also a question of how much to charge. Regular Abilities cost two times their current level in Experience Points to raise, and the Vampire Storytellers' Companion says that Secondary Abilities should only cost their current level in Experience Points. That seems to cheapen their importance and use, and could make it a bit too easy for players to "min/max" their characters: taking advantage of cheap purchasing costs to raise several, high-important

Secondary Abilities up to 5 after a few good sessions, and ignoring their regular Abilities altogether.

Suggestion: Split the Difference

One way to handle what to do with the confusion of Secondary Abilities is to separate them into two new entities: "Other Abilities" and "Ability Specialties."

In this method, "Other Abilities" would be Talents, Skills, and Knowledges that must be learned to do certain things, or at least do them well. Put another way: if it can logically exist by itself, without needing to have another Ability to use it, it's an Other Ability. These would be such Abilities as Pilot, Archery, Ride, Lore, Instruction, and so on. They would cost the same amount as Regular Abilities during Character Creation, and cost the same to raise through Experience Points as Regular Abilities. The only difference between these "Other Abilities" and Regular Abilities is that they're not printed on the character sheet.

The "Ability Specialties," on the other hand, would be those Secondary Abilities which are enhancements of, or alternatives to, Regular Abilities. If Other Abilities are those which can logically exist by themselves, then Ability Specialties are things which need to be coupled with something else: Fast Talk with Subterfuge, Swimming with Athletics, Computer Hacking with Computer, and so on.

Ability Specialties would go from 1 to 5, but they would not be rolled in Attribute + Ability rolls. Instead, they would grant modifiers to Attribute + Ability rolls made that compliment the Ability Specialty. If someone has the Climbing Ability Specialty, then they would make a Dexterity + Athletics roll to climb a wall, but each dot they possessed in Climbing would lower the Difficulty by 1.

Ability Specialties would cost one point per Dot in Step Three of character creation, and two Freebie Points per dot in Step Five. During character creation, they cannot be taken at more than half (rounding down) the starting level of whatever Ability they are most likely to modify, which means that they can never be taken above two dots by starting characters. They would cost two times their Current Rating to raise with Experience Points.

To use Jorge again as an example: when he was created, he was given a Firearms of 4, and his player has him take the Ability Specialty of Fast Draw. His player can only take two dots in this Ability Specialty at character creation, because that is half of Jorge's Firearms Ability. Later, during play, his player can raise his Ability Specialty up with Experience Points.

Old "Specialties" and What to Do With Them

If Storytellers choose to use the Other Ability/Ability Specialty system, the obvious question is what to do about the old Specialties. Under current Storyteller System rules, characters who have the 4th level of any Ability or Attribute may have what is known as a Specialty to go with it. Specialties allow for players to reroll any 10's that come up when using that Ability or Attribute in the manner indicated by the Specialty.

So, if the Other Ability/Ability Specialty system is adopted, a character who has an Ability Specialty of Swimming and a Specialty in "Australian Longstroke" is double-dipping a bit. She will not only stand a better chance to get successes through minus modifiers to her roll, but she'll have the chance of getting even more by rolling 10's. This could be min/maxed quite obnoxiously, especially with combat-oriented characters, or those characters who are designed to do one thing, and only one thing, extremely well.

One way to handle this problem is to do away with such "Specialties" altogether. In this method, a 10 rolled becomes just a very good result for that die. The chances of getting more successes through Special Ability modifiers does away with the chancy boost that a 10 rolled at the right time can give.

Another way to deal with it would be to allow Specialties for Attributes and not Abilities. Most of the suggested Specialties for Attributes given in the core book are descriptions, rather than tasks, and this is good. The Storyteller

should make certain that her players don't pick Specialty descriptions that come too close to any Ability Specialties they may have. She should also encourage them to roleplay out any such Specialties, rather than just letting them reroll 10's on any roll using that Attribute as a matter of course.

Other Abilities and Ability Specialties for Vampire: The Masquerade Revised Edition

To start Storytellers off, I have compiled a list of Other Abilities and Ability Specialties from the Secondary Abilities given for *Vampire: The Masquerade Revised Edition*. They are listed with whether they are described in the *Vampire Storytellers Companion (VSC)*, *Guide to the Camarilla (GttC)*, or *Guide to the Sabbat (GttS)*. Those suggested as Ability Specialties are coupled with the regular Abilities they would most likely modify.

The *VSC* also gives lists of Hobby Talents, Professional Skills, and Expert Knowledges. Most of these were spelled out in the 2nd edition *Vampire Players Guide*, and some of them were also written up in the *GttC* or *GttS*. Storytellers can go through those lists of suggested Abilities and separate the Other Abilities from the Ability Specialties themselves, based on the suggested criteria above.

Also note that Fortune Telling, given in the *Guide to the Sabbat*, is not found below. The authors say that it's up to the Storyteller to decide if it really works in her game, or if it's just a sham. If Fortune Telling works as a divinatory act, then it should be listed as an Other Ability. If it's all trickery, though, then it should be listed as an Ability Specialty, and could be coupled with either Empathy or Subterfuge depending on the soothsayer's style.

Other Abilities

- Archery (*VSC*)
- Area Knowledge (*VSC*)
- Black Hand Lore (*GttS*)
- Bureaucracy (*VSC*)
- Camarilla Lore (*VSC*)
- City Secrets (*VSC*)
- Clan Knowledge (*GttC*)
- Cryptography (*VSC*)
- Demolitions (*VSC*)
- Enigmas (*VSC*)
- Grace (*VSC*)
- Intuition (*VSC*)
- Instruction (*VSC*)
- Masquerade (*VSC*)
- Meditation (*VSC*)
- Pilot (*VSC*)
- Psychology (*GttC*)
- Ride (*VSC*)
- Research (*VSC*)
- Sabbat Lore (*VSC*)
- Scrounging (*GttC*)
- Sewer Lore (*VSC*)
- Style (*VSC*)
- Underworld Lore (*GttS*)

Ability Specialties

Acrobatics (*GttC*) (Athletics)

Camouflage (<i>GttC</i>)	(Stealth)
Computer Hacking (<i>GttC</i>)	(Computer)
Disguise (<i>VSC</i>)	(Performance)
Diplomacy (<i>GttC</i>)	(Expression or Subterfuge)
Economics (<i>GttC</i>)	(Finance or Academics)
Fire Dancing (<i>GttS</i>)	(Athletics)
Haggling (<i>GttC</i>)	(Expression or Subterfuge)
History (<i>GttC</i>)	(Academics)
Hunting (<i>GttC</i>)	(Survival)
Interrogation (<i>VSC</i>)	(Empathy or Intimidation)
Intrigue (<i>GttC</i>)	(Subterfuge)
Lip Reading (<i>VSC</i>)	(Alertness)
Mimicry (<i>VSC</i>)	(Performance)
Panhandling (<i>GttS</i>)	(Empathy)
Search (<i>GttC</i>)	(Investigation)
Sleight of Hand (<i>VSC</i>)	(Performance or Subterfuge)
Throwing (<i>VSC</i>)	(Athletics)
Vamp (<i>GttS</i>)	(Empathy or Subterfuge)
Ventriloquism (<i>VSC</i>)	(Performance)

Concealable Weapons and Equipment for GURPS

by Ian Freeman

Has this ever happened to you? You're monitoring someone, or maybe you're looking for someone. Whatever the reason, you've been invited to a ball, or a concert, or a movie. You don't want to go unarmed, but you can't very well carry your assault rifle with you. The solution: concealed weapons, of course. They've got style, substance, and most importantly: they'll all fit in your tux without anyone the wiser.

All of the equipment listed is TL7.

Electrode Gloves/Nails

The item is concealed as a glove of any kind. Attached to each of the fingers of the glove, concealed on the inside, is a small electrode. Each electrode is attached to a 6 yard, extremely thin wire that carries a strong electrical charge. When the gloves are simply worn, this wire wraps around the finger of each prospective launcher. The electrodes can be launched with a flick of the wrist. Once a nail electrode has been fired, that electrode can never be used again.

Upon use, the wearer makes a DX roll. The weapon has Acc 4, and SS 10 (DX). On a success, the electrode hits; on a failure, it misses. The defender may dodge or block, but not parry . . . but blocking with shields that conducts electricity does not work. A successful block with a metallic item counts as a hit on the part of the attacker. Anyone hit must make a HT+2 roll. On a failure they are immobilized by the charge and they drop to the ground for as long as the electrode is inside them (up to a maximum of 2 minutes).

Armor has no effect on the electrodes (disregard its PD), unless it is more than a 1/2 inch thick. Typically, any armor with a PD of 4, or a DR of 4, will be more than 1/2 inch thick. It must be this thick, because the current can jump that far. If the armor in question is conductive of electricity, never use its PD, regardless of thickness.

The user may fire as many electrodes as they choose, one from each finger. For each additional 3, the DX roll is penalized by 1. For each additional electrode, the targets HT is penalized by one for the purposes of the roll.

Treat multiple shots as you would any other burst (i.e., into 2 groups of 4, and 1 group of 2 if you fired all the electrodes).

While an electrode is in a target, they suffer -1 to all success rolls (per electrode), even if they succeeded their HT roll (it still hurts!). This effect lasts for 2 minutes, or until the offending electrodes are removed.

Alternatively, this item may be taken in a surgically implanted form. If the GM is willing to stretch the boundaries of TL7, or if the players have access to TL8 equipment, the electrodes may be surgically implanted under the users fingernails. The weapon works exactly the same way, except in terms of pricing.

Any close examination of the inside of the glove will reveal them to be abnormal. Only invasive surgery will reveal the nature of surgically implanted equipment.

Each gloves cost \$150, and each electrode (which must be replaced after each use) costs \$100. The implanted form costs \$300 per finger, and each electrode cost the same amount (\$100).

Cufflink Chemical Delivery System

A specific chemical is contained within each of your cufflinks. When the cufflink is snapped in half, it releases a chemical and has an affect. Each cufflink costs \$25, but you must also pay for the chemicals. As a note, you typically wear 2 cufflinks on each sleeve. Their weight is negligible.

Magnesium Flares

Upon breaking, a spark lights on the magnesium strip in the cufflink. 2 seconds after the cufflink is broken, the magnesium ignites. Magnesium burns impossibly bright, and anyone directly looking at the flare must make an HT-10 roll. For every point the roll is failed by, the victim is blinded for 3 seconds. On a critical failure, the victim suffers serious damage to their retina and is blinded for 2d hours.

For each 5 yards that separate the target and the flare, they gain a + 1 bonus to their HT roll. The maximum range is 30 yards.

Anyone who knows what is about to happen may choose to look away; everyone else must make an IQ check to realize it.

Magnesium flare cufflinks cost \$350 each.

Smelling Salts

This cufflink is used by breaking it under the intended target's nose. Upon inhaling, the target must make an HT roll. This roll is modified by anything that modified the original HT roll that resulted in their unconsciousness (unless, of course, there was no HT roll, in which case this check is unmodified). If the target succeeds at the roll, they are immediately roused to consciousness. They do not regain HT, so any further damage (if they are in the negatives) will immediately return them to unconsciousness, but other than that this return to consciousness is permanent. It will not return someone to consciousness if they are in the negatives as far as their own HT (i.e. In risk of death).

Smelling salt cufflinks cost \$50 each.

Smoke Packet

The cufflink is filled with a compressed gas that reacts with oxygen to produce a thick, opaque smog. It does not restrict breathing, but does completely obscure lines of sight. Each charge contains enough chemical to fill a 4 yard by 4 yard by 4 yard area (64 cubic yards). The smog remains until cleared by fans or whatnot. If the ceiling of the targeted area is less than 4 yards, modify the area of effect appropriately. If the ceiling is 2 yards, then double the area of effect to 128 cubic yards, which is 8 yards by 8 yards by 2 yards (the height of the ceiling).

Smoke packet cufflinks cost \$120 each.

Intoxicant

When cracked open, a liquid runs out and will dissolve in any liquid. It has no odor or taste. Anyone who drinks the concoction must make an HT-3 roll, or become immediately impressionable. Anyone using the fast-talk, sex-appeal, hypnotism or any other skills that depend on convincing someone gain a +6 to their checks against the subject. The effects last for 1 hour.

Intoxicant cufflinks cost \$80 each.

Phosphorus Ceramic Dagger

This a small, ceramic (so it is not picked up by metal detectors) dagger that has been coated in phosphorus and is contained in a special one-use sheath. The sheath is in the form of a necktie, which costs \$65 (but you can pay more for the necktie if you would prefer a higher quality one).

Immediately upon drawing the dagger, its phosphorus coating ignites into a white hot flame. Phosphorus ignites when

it comes in contact with oxygen; therefore, the necktie is specially designed to prevent this reaction before the dagger is drawn.

The dagger itself is a fairly average knife, dealing Thrust -1 piercing damage, or Swing-1 slashing damage. But then comes the phosphorus. The white hot flames deal 1d-1 damage in addition to the damage done by the attack.

The Dagger can be used on inanimate objects. It will ignite paper instantly, and wood in 1 second.

The burning chemicals last for 90 seconds.

The burning chemicals essentially destroy the dagger, at the end of the elapsed time.

The tie costs \$65 (or more for a nicer tie), and the dagger and chemicals are \$450 (\$200 for the dagger, \$250 for the chemicals). It weighs a third of a pound.

Razor-Barb Neck Protector

A thin metal strip, about an inch wide, is wrapped around the wearer's neck. It is concealed under their collar. If any substantial amount of force is applied to the wearer throat or neck, tiny razor sharp barbs pop out of the metal strip, slicing through flesh, bone and almost anything else.

If the wearer is being choked by some sort of garrote wire, cable, or rope, it is immediately sliced through by the razor barbs, freeing the wearer.

If someone is unfortunate enough to use their hands or arms to strangle the wearer, the barbs immediately do 1 point of damage, and the attacker must make a Will-6 roll or let go (unless, of course, they want to let go). If the attacker manages to hold on, they are at -3 to all strength checks to hold on to the wearer due to the excruciating pain inflicted by the barbs.

The wearer may choose to coat the barbs with any poisons they choose, at additional cost.

The Neck Protector weighs a half pound, and costs \$370.

Arm Guards

Thin strips of a carbon-fiber titanium alloy run up and along the wearer's outer, lower arms. These are so that the wearer may more effectively parry melee attacks.

The user makes unarmed parry rolls as normal, but, if the user succeeds by at least 2, there is no chance that their arms can be struck. Typically, these are worn under ones clothing.

These weigh 1-1/2 pounds, and cost \$800.

Shoe Contained Caltrops

These can be added to any reasonably sized shoes. A number of caltrops, and a small explosive charge, are placed in the heel of a shoe. A small cable runs up your pant-leg into your pocket. The wearer can reach into their pocket and press a button, releasing the caltrops and allowing the small charge to scatter them about.

The caltrops fill a 2 by 2 yard area on the ground immediately behind the wearer. An enormous number are scattered about, because they are stored in the form of very small ball bearings, but they expand into 4 stainless steel blades. To move through the caltrops, you must make a DX roll. On a success, the person may move through the caltrops at 1/4 speed. On a failure, they take 1 point of damage to their feet. The excruciating pain restricts their movement (and

dodge roll) to 1/3 of normal. Also, they are at -1 to all success rolls.

The entire unit, consisting of the trigger, the caltrops and the installation costs \$250, plus the cost of a shoe. The weight is negligible.

Garrote Wire

A thin, very sharp wire is stored in the wearers belt. It can be easily removed in a single second. This wire is about 2 feet long, and is used to aid in strangulation and suffocation attempts.

While using a garrote wire, strangulation attempts are handled exactly as they normally are, except the user gets an effective +5 to strength due to the leverage granted by the wire and the difficulty of removing it from around the target's neck.

Alternatively, the wire can be stored within a watch, pulling on the winder extracts the wire.

The wire costs \$35, the belt costs \$40, and the watch costs \$90 (or more, for a better watch).

Arm Shiv

A shiv is a long, 3/4 inch thick dagger that can deal either piercing or slashing damage.

While it may not make it through a metal detector, it sure is deadly. An 18" retractable shiv is attached to your lower underarm. By touching the controls on your arm, the Shiv can be fully extended, fully retracted or extended up to the wearers knuckles.

If it is extended to the knuckles, treat attacks with it as a standard close combat strike dealing normal punching damage. Except, on a successful hit it deals an additional Thrust-1 slashing damage. On the other hand, when extended to its full 18" size, it is deadly weapon indeed. It uses the Knife skill, or any unarmed combat skill, or Shortsword-1 (what with it being a foot and a half long . . .). It deals swing+2 slashing damage, or thrust+1 piercing damage.

It takes a single second to alter the length of the blade. If the player takes the skill Fast Draw (Arm Shiv), the size can be changed in (effectively) zero time.

If you would like, you can coat this weapon with phosphorus and add an airtight containment sheath (so that you don't burn your arm). Doing so gives all the same bonuses as the Ceramic Dagger, but costs more, since this one is bigger.

This weapon weighs a 1/2 pound, and the complete set-up (including dagger and sheath) costs \$950. Coating it in phosphorus costs an additional \$450 for the chemical, and \$200 for the modified sheath.

Reversed, Concealed Holsters

This is a holster which is designed to be worn on your back, under clothing. The holster is upside-down, so that the gun inside can be accessed by reaching up the bottom of your shirt. Naturally, tucking in clothing will cause problems. Therefore, if you are wearing a suit, the holster can be worn on the outside of your undershirt. It's not visible, but accessible by reaching under your blazer or coat.

The holsters are designed to be concealed and confer a +6 to all Holdout checks. They will only work with pistols that are not overly large. For example, a .50 caliber desert eagle with a 9" silencer would be too big. What can and cannot fit is up to the GM, but almost all pistols will.

The holster weighs 1/2 pound, and costs \$75.

Pyramid Review

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Written by **Deid're Brooks, Steven Michael DiPesa, Lucien Soulban**

160 pages; \$19.95

Since its inception, the *Aberrant* line has been unabashedly metaplotted, exploring the interactions between Novas and society over the course of many years. However, the advancement of the metaplot has been handled in a uniquely well-coordinated manner, as the job of advancing the timeline has been confined primarily to the *Aberrant Worldwide* series of adventure anthologies, each of which promises to place the PCs in the midst of the major events of a given period--in the case of *Phase II, 2010-2015*. The very consciousness with which the metaplot is being advanced means that the series is also written with an eye towards how it might unfold differently in the an individual campaign, and earns high marks for flexibility -- a quality which adds to the ease with which many of these adventures could be ported over to a non-Aberrant Supers campaign.

(SPOILER ALERT!)

The adventure design allows a GM to involve PCs from the most loyal Utopian to the most radical Terat to take roughly the same course through the adventure (and to desire roughly the same outcome), maximizing utility to all gaming groups while keeping the complexity from being unwieldy. For better or worse, this generally means that *Aberrant Worldwide Phase II* drags the setting even further into the realm of conspiracy gaming. Three of the four adventures feature some minor faction with a handful of Novas embarking on a conspiracy to gain a great deal of influence in the baseline world with an agenda that can plausibly upset all Novas, and the fourth is set in the aftermath of an elaborate series of double-dealings by Proteus -- all end with lots of explosions.

The first adventure, "The Pope of Babylon," is the best of the book, centering around an extremist faction of the Roman Catholic Church attempting to wrest control of the Papacy. This will result in the rescinding of Ad Dei Lucem, the papal bull that declares humans and Novas equal in judgment. Placing the characters between two conspiracies dueling over the future of religion and crawling with obscure catholic sects, aging mobsters, and super powered fanatics, the adventure is original, well researched, and entertaining. Additionally, it is surprisingly portable for such an intricate story of intrigue, as the only major setting-specific faction required to play a significant role in the action is the Camparelli-Zukhov crime syndicate, easily replaced by a generic equivalent.

"A Green and Pleasant Land," by contrast, is less an adventure than a short faction-writeup on a pseudo-Masonic English Nova Cult lead by a villain so cinematic he could have jumped straight out of a James Bond film. Arthur Francis Anningsley is a Mega-Intelligent Nova with a complicated master plan to return England to a role of global dominance -- with himself as absolute monarch -- by assassinating hundreds of world leaders, suppressing dangerous Nova elements and, for no particular reason, mining London's tube system. Rather than a linear adventure workup, it provides a workup on the cult, its members, Aberrant-London, Anningsley's plans, a few hooks and a couple of potential complications which may be stirred in at the GM's leisure.

The third adventure, "Dominion," feels the most complicated and wide-ranging of the scenarios, and almost demands to be spread out in the background of several months of play, as one of DeVries' top executives conspires towards the military conquest of the Ukraine (sense a pattern yet?). The set dressing is exotic, ranging from the "cold-war" feel of Skopje, Macedonia to religious ceremonies in small Indian villages to the jungles of South America to the tribunals of

the United Nations. The forty page adventure could, in fact, easily form the foundation of an entire campaign. However, it seems unlikely that its elaborate plot could easily survive contact with the players, not to mention the near necessity of a GM fiat to place the characters in Kiev at the crucial moment. It's an interesting setup, and the climax, wherein the players must somehow figure out a means to delay a larger and more powerful force of Novas long enough for reinforcements to arrive, is the sort of epic climax worthy of unraveling a complicated conspiracy to get to.

The final adventure in the book, set in the aftermath of a Team Tomorrow raid on The Amp Room, "Where Heaven Ends," is the Aberrant universe's answer to "Saving Private Ryan," as the PCs are sent into a war-zone to rescue an important NPC. While the adventure itself is a race-against-the-clock with a good objective, interesting twists and an exciting setting, I can't help but feel a twinge of disappointment that the plot calls for the PCs to sidestep around the Aberrant Universe's two major teams slugging it out over the setting's most famous piece of real-estate, rather than becoming directly involved.

(END SPOILER ALERT)

Aberrant Worldwide Phase II is a mixed bag. The adventures themselves are individually solid and enjoyable, the 45 pages of flavor text documents are consistent with the high quality standard in the ***Aberrant*** line, and the ***Worldwide*** format remains a sound one both for adventure publishing and for involving PCs in the metaplot. As a whole, however, the collection suffers from a lack of variety, particularly when compared with ***Worldwide Phase I***.

-- *Anthony Damiani*

Pyramid Review

Psionics Handbook (for D&D)

Published by [Wizards of the Coast](#)



Written by **Bruce R. Cordell**

160 color pages; \$26.95

The *Psionics Handbook* is almost *GURPS* like in its approach to Psionics, in that its total coverage that can be added whole, piecemeal, or ignored. In this one book, new classes, skills, feats, psionics, powers, characters types, psionic items, monsters, and the all important character sheet are laid out for 3rd edition consumption.

Starting off with Psionic Classes, the reader is introduced to the Psion and the Psychic Warrior. The former is similar to a sorcerer in terms of combat deficiencies -- and his reliance on special abilities -- while the latter has fighting skills and some psionic ability. The interesting thing about the Psion is there is no generic psionist. Instead, the psion must specialize in one of the fields of psionic abilities: egoist, nomad, savant, shaper, seer, and telepath. This method works so well that it's amazing that Wizards didn't do this for the wizard classes. Each section comes with standard class information and, more importantly, starting packages that show how different races can start off with the new classes.

Each class gains access to psionic powers similar to a standard spellcaster gaining access to different level spells. The main difference is that psionics use power points to fuel their selections. Each class gains bonus power points based on the ability score more appropriate to the class. This prevents the seer, who should have a high Wisdom, from putting his highest score in Constitution. These new characters still use the same experience table, and can multi-class into other classes with the standard restrictions. More importantly, other classes can multi-class into these new classes per normal rules.

Unlike previous editions, psionics fit much better in some areas. In 2nd edition for instance, many creatures lacked psionic defenses of any kind. In 3rd, if you have Spell Resistance, you have Power (Psionic) Resistance. In addition, psionics are now level-based, much like spells. These concepts make it easier to integrate into the core rules than ever before.

Chapter Two, Skills, brings new skills to 3rd edition like Knowledge: Psionics, and Stabilize Self, the ability to stop yourself from dying of a near-fatal wound.

Chapter Three, Feats, show how to customize your character with one of the main innovations of 3rd edition. While there are dozens of new abilities listed, for some reason they decided to reprint dodge, point blank shot, power attack, and sunder. Now the book is already taking flack for its price, Wizards had no need to do any reprints in this book. Outside of those few reprints though, feats like deep impact, the ability to strike an opponent with a weapon as if you were using a spell touch attack, (for those who don't know, it ignores armor) and it's range equal, Fell Shot, which lets the user's ranged attacks gain that benefit. While most of these abilities are for psionist only, I imagine that soon we'll see a Dragon article converting many of these feats to wizard/cleric equivalents.

Chapter Four, Psionics, gives GMs ideas on how powers are displayed, called upon, and interact with the game. Advice is given on which powers to chose, and the definition of what exactly a psionic power is. (It's a one-time psionic effect.) The information is good for roleplaying, especially the breakdown of the different psionic types: clairsentience, metacreativity, psychokinesis, psychometabolism, and psychoportation. This chapter also covers making psionics different from magic in a campaign that wants psionic characters to truly stand out. In addition, there are

several psionic diseases introduced in the book.

Chapter Five is a listing of psion powers from 0 to 9th level. The powers are listed by class, level, and alphabetical for reference, then after, the details of each power are listed purely alphabetically. This makes for easy reference when looking up a specific class and level reference, or just looking up the psionic power itself. Players will have a fun time deciding what new toys they want their characters to have. For example, *Breath of the Dragon* is a 6th level ability deals 11d4 points of damage, while a simple ability, *Bolt*, creates a single projectile weapon. It doesn't launch it, merely creates it. Unlike most spells, psion abilities are almost always standard in damage in relation to the characters level. *Flaming Shroud* inflicts 11d6 points when the psion can first select it at 12th level to 20th level.

Chapter Six, *Characters*, presents unique prestige classes based around and on psions. The *Metamind* is concerned only with mastering raw psion power, the *Pyrokineticist* specializes in the field of fire, the *Slayer* hunts down *Mind Flayers*, and the *Soulknife* is an assassin whose specialization with psionics makes him a dangerous foe. The next section allows for the creation of random NPC psionicists. This is a great section for GMs in a hurry. With a few die rolls, you can determine alignment, class, ability scores, and look at the different charts which give a level by level breakdown of what each psionicist can do.

Chapter Seven, *Psionic Items*, brings all manner of new devices in a format similar to the *Dungeon Masters Guide*. For example, items are sectioned off by item type, so under *Armor and Shield*, you can find crystalline armor or armor that has the quickness special ability. Under *Psionic Weapon Special Abilities Description*, there are weapons that excel at parrying, or those that can, through the use of the impact ability, increase their own mass upon striking. Some of the more interesting items, crystal capacitors, are power point storage devices, while *dorjes* are similar to wands, with one psionic power and 50 charges.

Chapter Eight, *Monsters*, updates old favorites like the *Githyanki*, *Githzerai*, and *Intellect Devourer*, as well as bringing in specialized monsters like the *Neothelid* and the *Phthisic* from the *Monstrous Arcana* series. More importantly though, if you want a *Mind Flayer* that has psionic abilities, you no longer have to ponder the existence of two subspecies; instead, just add a psionic template to the current *Mind Flayer*. At the end is a table that breaks the monsters down by challenge rating and alphabetizes them.

The last few pages include a two-page index and a new character sheet. The index is useful, but the character sheet is nothing special. Wizards could have taken the time to make at least two different sheets here, one template for psions and another for psychic warriors.

Most of the book uses the standard two column layout. Some exceptions, like for long tables such as *Psionic Character Skills*, break the monotony of the text up nicely. The book boasts full color throughout, which is truly helpful for DMs unfamiliar with some of the more exotic monsters and powers in the book. The art is similar to other 3rd edition products, so if you enjoyed the *PHB*, *DMG*, or *MM*, you'll enjoy this art.

Some people may consider the \$26.95 pricetag unreasonable, but it is comperable with, say, the 178-page b&w *GURPS Traveller* released for \$29.95 in 1998. For 160 full color pages in a hardcover, \$26.95 seems very reasonable.

If you're going to use Psionics in D&D 3rd ed, this book is easy to insert either whole, or piece by piece into your campaign. A lot of the best material from various sourcebook, like the *Monstrous Arcana* *Illithid*, and the psionic setting *Dark Sun*, have been updated into the new edition smoothly. And not content to leave well enough alone, Wizards of the Coast has added 10 pages of web enhancements which add old favorites like *Gem Dragons*, the *Su Monster*, and the insect like *Thri-Kreen* to the 3rd edition rules. The material is done in pdf format, and follows the standard format for printed materials. It can be found online at http://www.wizards.com/dnd/files/Psionics_enhance.pdf. But if you're only interested in picking the *Psionic Handbook* apart for the feats, magic items, and monsters, you might not be getting your money's worth.

-- Joe G. Kushner

Budget Battlefield

Published by [MicroTactix](#)

Designed by Greg Poehlein



Illustrated by Gary M. Williams

Rules, figures, and two scenarios in six Adobe Acrobat files and four TIFF files; \$9.00

Every once in awhile, an idea comes along that causes the gaming world to smack itself on its collective forehead and ask, "Why didn't we think of that?"

MicroTactix' latest offering, *Budget Battlefield*, is just such an idea. This miniature war game replaces traditional lead and plastic figures with triangular cardboard figures in electronic files, allowing players to print as many as needed to compose an army. Simply cut out the figures, glue them to cardboard bases, and it's clobberin' time. In addition, *Budget Battlefield* is fully integrated with MicroTactix' *Simply Roleplaying* and *Compact Combat* games, allowing players to use the same characters in three different types of games.

The rules set is streamlined to about thirty pages that cover science fiction and fantasy battles. The system is so flexible that the hostilities are balanced even if players decide that the undead hordes need to invade Saturn Outpost Alpha. The rules support virtually any size battle, from skirmishes of 50 figures to epics of 200 figures.

Gamers can purchase *Budget Battlefield* at the MicroTactix World Wide Web site using a secure credit card transaction. For nine dollars, they get a compressed ZIP file containing Adobe Acrobat files for the cover art, four army lists (two science fiction and two fantasy), a 31-page rulebook, a set of quick reference sheets, and fifteen pages worth of army figures, scenery, and vehicles. The figures are repeated in four TIFF files for those who wish to work with them in a graphics program. The ZIP software and Adobe Acrobat software are both available either free or as shareware at the software manufacturers' web sites.

After downloading, printing, and assembling the necessary figures, players are ready for mayhem. The game includes two scenarios. The first is a large fantasy battle between the Royal Army and Undead Army with a few forests and mausoleums. The second is a science fiction skirmish between the Planetary Army and Mercenary Army with optional grav platform mortars and armored cars. Army size is controlled by the Cost of every figure or vehicle. Players agree on a total number of points before a battle and spend these points buying figures. The more powerful a figure, the more it costs.

Players will also need to keep their Troop Cards handy. A Troop Card contains all of the statistics for a type of figure. Every type of figure has a Move allowance in inches, Hit Factor that shows how much damage he can take before dying, Morale rank that describes his susceptibility to panic, and Attack table which allows a single, ten-sided die roll to determine his success in combat. Players need only one Troop card for each type of figure they are using.

The turn sequence is somewhat familiar to experienced war gamers. Each army rolls for initiative. The loser moves their entire army, then the winner moves their entire army. This can make for some long turns depending on the size of the armies, but this is a common complaint about war gaming and not particular to *Budget Battlefield*.

Figures do not move entirely independently. At the beginning of the game, players assemble their figures into Units, which is a group of at least two of the same type of figure. Every figure in a Unit must end their movement within one

inch of at least one other member of their Unit. Thus, a unit can move in single file, in a block, or any other shape as long as each figure remains part of that Unit. Like most war games, the terrain around the figures may slow them down or stop them.

Next, the player with initiative attacks. Miniatures whose bases are touching may engage in melee combat and figures armed with ranged weapons may fire at distances prescribed on their Troop Cards. In either case, combat resolution is quick and efficient. A ten-sided die roll tells how much damage an attacker does. If this damage equals or exceeds the defender's Hit Factor, as listed on the Troop Card, then the defender is dead. The player that lost initiative attacks second, but because *Budget Battlefield* considers combat to be simultaneous, even those figures already killed get a parting shot.

A roll of ten is a Critical Hit which allows another roll for additional damage. Additional tens keep adding to the total damage. Thus, even a weak skeleton has some chance to kill a powerful member of the Planetary Army.

Any figure that did not attack on this turn gets a second movement phase. This allows the archers to hang back and fire while the melee fighters close rapidly.

Finally, players remove all of the casualties and check to see if a Unit has failed morale. A number of factors affect morale, but essentially any Unit that lost a fourth of its number may be paralyzed by fear or even run screaming for their mothers.

While most of the figures on the field have very simple abilities, a few are more complicated. Commanders are those figures that are able to split apart and reform Units and who give nearby Units a bonus on their morale checks. Heroes are those truly spectacular characters that can destroy multiple figures with a single attack and have actual hit points, meaning an opponent must damage them multiple times before they take a dirt nap.

Gamers who enjoy the aesthetics of painted miniatures and realistic scenery are not left out. Obviously, players can replace the cardboard figures with three dimensional miniatures of their choice. Even more interesting, though, *Budget Battlefield* provides all of the rules necessary to give any miniature *Budget Battlefield* statistics. Players can create new types of troops borrowing figures from any other game.

Budget Battlefield is not without its faults. These are the first version of the rules, and the MicroTactix Forum already has a correction to the turn sequence. Gary Williams' art is often good, but sometimes fails to make the different types of units distinguishable at a glance. For example, the Royal Army Commander can be tough to find if he is on foot in a group of regular militia. Finally, there is a notable absence of magic in *Budget Battlefield*. There are no fireballs, speed potions, or healing arts for the fantasy characters. The science fiction characters get grenades and vehicles, but the system leaves considerable room for this kind of flavor. Perhaps MicroTactix will consider a supplement when *Budget Battlefield* receives the success it deserves.

-- Brad Weier

Frog-Boiling For Fun And Profit: Adding Conspiracy To Your Game

"If thou be'st not immortal, look about you: security gives way to conspiracy. The mighty gods defend thee!"
-- William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, II:iii:4-5

They say that They boil frogs. Or, rather, Those who say things about Them say that They (Them, not Those) boil frogs. If this is the kind of thing you want your players to say, or if it's the kind of thing you want to say to your players, you want to run a conspiracy game. To do that, you'll want to boil your players like They (Them, not your players) boil frogs, in a bubbling broth of pronouns and all-concealing steam. Cooking directions follow -- so hop on in, the water's fine!

"That was nothing. But, that's how it always begins . . . very small."
-- Egg Shen (Victor Wong), *Big Trouble in Little China*

All that batrachian business is by way of analogy. If you want to cook a frog, you put him in a pot of warm water and turn up the heat a little bit at a time. The frog, who would hop out of the pot if you just tossed him right into boiling water, will placidly sit still and simmer to death as the heat increases by slow degrees. The parallel case in game design is the slow introduction of little elements, hints, connections, and so forth. By the time the characters notice How It All Fits Together, they're well and truly cooked. (A somewhat important note: Players aren't frogs. If the players keep hopping out of the water when it gets too warm, they don't want to play a conspiracy game. You can't make them, so don't try.) The "slow and sneaky" conspiracy game becomes a conspiracy game gradually, one piece at a time.

In general, then, start small and work up. Even if you've announced it's a conspiracy game already, this approach reflects the standard tropes of the genre. In addition to the usual missing documents, mysterious strangers, peculiar letters, odd graffiti, etc., the GM adding conspiracy to her game should connect in-game elements in inobvious ways. Have one character's contact in the ONI refer to another character's adopted brother. Plant clues at the scene of the burglary recalling an earlier murder the players thought was solved. In general, reach across [characters](#) or across "story arcs" for the sense of impending connections. In some games, this will just look like adding depth to the setting. Once you've spun a web that can withstand it, start putting in slightly bigger signs -- a black helicopter overhead, a significant tattoo on a "random mugger" or "wandering monster," or any of the rest of the [Conspiratorial Alphabet](#).

"All I know is that this Lo Pan character comes out of thin air in the middle of a goddamn alley while his buddies are flying around on wires cutting everybody to shreds while he just STANDS there waiting for me to drive my truck straight through him with LIGHT coming out of his mouth!"
-- Jack Burton (Kurt Russell), *Big Trouble in Little China*

Or, of course, you can just crash a flying saucer in their backyard. This "expanded scope" [nova](#) technique works well if you want to unmistakably "announce" the sudden irruption of conspiracy into the game. If the players seem to object, go ahead and Scully it with some plausible explanation. In a "straight" espionage game, the UFO was an experimental aircraft. In a "straight" historical game, the document is forged, or the eyewitness is crazy, or both. If, on the other hand, they react with wide-eyed avidity and drooling glee, they've signed on for the boiling -- and you can have Operation Moondust steal their UFO wreckage, or the Inquisition arrest their informant, or a fire destroy the evidence. Now, the characters want to find out what's going on -- and, ideally, so do the players. You expanded the scope of the game by flicking the lights on and showing them a glimpse of the Truth. Then you turned out the lights and contracted the scope again, but the Truth remains Out There, an afterimage in the darkness. You can go back to building things up by tiny increments, only this time the players eagerly add every tidbit to their mosaic, trying to fit the puzzle pieces you dole out into that one vision of the Truth they had before you hid it from them. Players will often work harder to uncover the Conspiracy if they have some notion of what it's conspiring to conceal -- and once they're sure the Air Force is working for MJ-12 to conceal alien infiltration, you can throw another Big Revelation at the players ("the aliens are invading because they're fighting the Freemasons") and jump-start to the next level.

*"O conspiracy!
Sham'st thou to show thy dangerous brow by night,
When evils are most free? O! Then by day
Where wilt thou find a cavern dark enough
To mask thy monstrous visage? Seek none, conspiracy;
Hide it in smiles and affability ..."*
-- William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, II:i:86-90

So when should you put in conspiracies? In the Obvious Case, where you said "I'm running a *GURPS Illuminati* game," the answer may be "right away," or you may boil the frog slowly as normal, albeit with its consent. Players may also request added elements of conspiracy in an ongoing game, either out of game ("It would be cool if you put conspiracies into the game.") or in-game ("My character suspects that the Black Dragon Society is behind this seemingly-unrelated string of murders.") The GM may suddenly decide to add conspiracies either to spice up a game that's gotten a little predictable, to explain a game that's gotten bizarrely tangled, or to scratch an Illuminated itch.

Like most elements of worldbuilding, conspiracies normally begin with the GM deciding to put them in. For the creative, "think-on-the-fly" GM, this can be as simple as: "There's definitely something behind this, and I'll figure it out later." Other GMs start big ("The Greys and the Cabal are behind everything") and fill in the middle levels on an ad hoc basis. Still others follow the "Boskone model" where little conspiracies lead to bigger ones, which lead to global ones, which lead to global, millennia-spanning ones, which lead to global, millennia-spanning, pandimensional ones, which lead to ... The Boskone Model is one direction you can take the "expanded scope" game, or you can go "sideways" -- each conspiracy may not lead to a bigger one behind it, but (say) to a different one opposing it. The GM may either have worked all of this out in advance, or she may fill in each layer of the onion in only as the characters solve the previous one.

*"There's a spy in the sky
There's a noise on the wire
There's a tap on the line
For every paranoid's desire"*
-- Bob Geldof, "Someone's Looking At You"

Like many Secrets What Is Hid From Players, a courageous GM can easily pick the coolest-sounding player theory and make it retroactively true (or mostly true) ten minutes after the players bring it up. Let's say that the GM wants to subtly turn her Air Adventure game into a conspiracy game. She starts by dropping hints into ongoing adventures: a drunk in the bar babbles about a "guy in a silver shirt," a newsreel says that a World War Two ace died in a plane crash, Admiral Byrd tours the air base, a mysterious heart attack grounds the blonde PC's rival. One or two mysterious "You don't know what's going on, get out while you can" type meetings with a trench-coated AFOSI type, and the players are all a-tizzy. Then, she sets the hook -- a test pilot's jet lands, completely empty, with snow in the cockpit interior. The GM thinks she's set up the [Antarctic Space Nazis](#) pretty well, a "Silver Shirt" fascist agitator seen nearby, an anti-Nazi killed, an Antarctic explorer shows up on mysterious business, a true Aryan granted a favor, and then the snow indicating a midair kidnapping by someone with snowy jackboots! The players, meanwhile, are buffaloed -- until one of them says something like: "I've got it! It's Shangri-La! The Lemurians wear silver robes, their pacifist ideology made them kill the famous warrior ace, Admiral Byrd knows the secret of the hollow earth, the heart attack was their psionic powers at work, and the snow is from the top of [Mount Shasta](#)." That's so much cooler (and, more importantly, the players are charged up about it and on target for it) that our GM might very well change horses in midstream; the Conspirators gain an eye and move underground. If she wants to work the Nazis in, she can expand the scope when the PCs find a giant emerald statue of Hitler in the Tibetan monastery -- now the players know the Nazis have to be involved somehow, and they'll set themselves to looking for those clues.

"The imaginary vastness and strangeness of the plot distracted people's understandings, and subverted every reason for reciprocal confidence. Besides ambition and cupidity, which were at first supposed to be the motives of the poisoners, they fancied, they even believed at length, that there was something of diabolical, voluptuous delight in this anointing -- an attraction predominating over the will. The ravings of the sick, who accused themselves of what they had apprehended from others, were considered as revelations, and rendered anything, so to say, credible of any one."

-- Alessandro Manzoni, *The Betrothed* (1827)

The attraction of the conspiracy will depend, of course, on the coolness of the GM's idea, and on the players' desires. Some players demand only grim and gritty conspiracies; CIA Cubans killed Kennedy, and Exxon triggered the Gulf War. Some players demand only big magical conspiracies; John Dee and the court of Faerie are behind the UFO phenomenon, and the Greys killed Kennedy with a microwave beam from orbit. "Realism" in conspiracy gaming is much like "realism" in magic or fantasy; a matter of taste, not of fact. That said, it may suit in-game realism to have a conspiracy "guest star" and vanish. Let's say that in one *GURPS Old West* scenario, wherein the PCs meet John Wilkes Booth living under an assumed name in Tombstone, they discover that the Egyptian Freemasons killed Lincoln. They then go back to gunfights and Indian raids for the rest of the campaign. On the other hand, game tone may require a villain who can take a larger role, but can be defeated rather than take over the game. In that model, the PCs decide to travel back East, and after a few adventures, eventually go to England and, in a guns-blazing climax, deal out a little frontier justice to the Grand Lodge of Luxor-in-London. If the players still have their conspiracy jones, the GM can always crash a UFO on them when they get back to the good old New Mexico Territory, and we're off again in a cloud of dust and frog-flavored steam.

Dork Tower!



Dork Tower!



Murphy's Rules



by John Kovalic

Murphy's Rules



Murphy's Rules



When Is Gaming Like A Cocktail Party?

This week I heard someone say something that made me think. (Well, okay . . . I think I read it in my email. But let's not get technical now.) Basically, it pointed out that roleplaying sessions also doubled as socialization opportunities for most groups, with a 50/50 split between gab time and actual gaming being fairly common. It pointed out that gaming groups, for many folks, were not unlike cocktail parties, with folks gathering over dice and character sheets instead of little blocks of cheese and glasses of wine.

Now, this struck me as interesting, because I know that staying "on-topic" with my groups has always been something of a problem. We'd often get together, goof around, game a bit, get snacks, chat, game, prepare dinner, chat, game, finish up the game, chat, then go home.

And we'd all have a great time.

I mention this because one of the things I've heard from some gamers is how they're upset that they can't get their group to stay on-topic, with too many quotes from Monty Python, too many memories of previous games, and too many discussions of *Babylon 5* creeping into the games. Now, having given the matter some thought this week, I've come to the conclusive question: What's wrong with chatting?

I mean, if everyone is playing (say) *Monopoly*, I presume it's okay to chat about things other than Keynesian economics. Chatting in and out of game is a cornerstone for games like *INWO*. And the insane ramblings inherent in most games of *Talisman* usually make the evening for me. ("Oh, no! I've been cursed by the Witch *and* the Devil . . . now I'm an *EVIL* toad!!!")

I suspect, in fact, that this *lack* of chatting is one of the things that has made it difficult for me to engage in many of the "alternative" gaming possibilities. Some of my friends play by email, but it seems less immediate and too soulless for me; I *like* being able to babble about how someone in a movie dealt with a situation that was similar to this one . . . only that solution wouldn't possibly work here. I think it's great when a player says, "It's been an awful week," and so the GM adds more ninjas to the adventure for stress-relieving carnage.

Of course, I also completely understand that we *are* there to roleplay, and a certain amount of on-topic time is required. I remember when one of my GM friends was having a hard time getting one player to stay focussed, since he kept insisting on wisecracking. After giving the player several warnings one session -- and then hearing one aside more -- the GM finally said, "Okay; your character actually said that, and the town is furious. In fact, it looks like they might call the slavers over to deal with you." And so the party needed to escape quickly out of town.

While I'm not sure I'd ever do that as a GM, I can definitely see the point. (Of course, I've never been in a situation where I've needed to do anything that drastic . . .)

In all, I tend to view my gaming sessions more like movies than cocktail parties. Some movies you talk about before, like *Star Wars: Episode I*. Some movies you talk about after, like *Fight Club*. And some movies you can't help but comment **during**, ala *Mystery Science Theatre 3000*. But talking during a movie that should be riveting? That's just tacky.

Regardless, I do believe that, whether its cocktail parties or movies or roleplaying games, they're all good excuses for gathering with friends and associates. And as long as everyone is having fun, who *cares* how on-topic or not everyone is?

* * *

I had a few folks asking about how to rate last week's Random Thought Table column. Well, if you log into the column, then scroll down (without going to the CGI script page that plugs in your answers), you'll see the "normal" rating menu at the end. (Such are the difficulties when you do something completely oddball with a column.)

Of course, you could also go to our [ratings page](#), if you were so inclined.

-- *Steven Marsh*

* * *

(Last week's answer) Yeah, right . . . Though if you got more than 20, pat yourself on the back.

(Four stars) "HEY!! DANYA! You said you wouldn't read this. Put it down girl!"

A Fist Full of Tunes You Can Whistle

A Scenario Location for GURPS Discworld

by Phil Masters

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Introduction

The Discworld is a big place, with all sorts of locations to be found -- and all sorts of stories happening. There is even room for narratives involving taciturn men with weapons, a hot, dry climate, a certain amount of posing in broad-brimmed hats (masks optional), and inadvisable amounts of smoking.

Oh, and tunes you can whistle.

This location for scenarios uses an area of the Disc with the right sort of climate as a location for such stories. (Actually, what few hints appear in the books suggest that Brindisi is more Italianate than Mexican -- but spaghetti is certainly popular there.) All you need to do now is get your PCs off to that part of the world, and get them talking slow.

*Note: This setting is **not** an "official" part of the Discworld, although it's not too inconsistent with stuff that has appeared in the novels. All sorts of stories fit on the Disc without too much trouble, and if you want to drop a specific set of clichés into a [GURPS Discworld](#) game, all you have to do is decide where they happen, and how the Disc distorts the familiar themes. This article can be taken as a demonstration of the technique.*

The Region: Backwoods Brindisi

Somewhere between Klatchistan and Genua, far enough to Rimwards to get unpleasantly warm but not near enough to the sea to get much rain, the land is a parched waste that somehow, just about, supports ranch-style farming and a bit of other miscellaneous food production. (Beans, mostly.) There's also enough minerals to support a mining industry. (Gold turns up sporadically, usually leading to trouble.) Towns are few and far between here, and any government is spread so thin as to be transparent; the resulting society is one where men can be men and dwarfs can be dwarfs. In other words, the mortality rate due to violence is appalling.

Although this region is technologically almost as advanced as Ankh- Morpork, in an impoverished sort of way, the basic social pattern is feudal. Not, you understand, that you'll find many knights and barons; rather, any local bigshot who has enough heavies, cash, and macho pose can claim to be the boss of his area. (Or hers; on this part of the Disc, "Being In Charge" is almost an equal-opportunities profession, although raw muscle can be a crucial advantage.) The law is supposedly laid down in some royal court off in the more refined coastal towns, and is enforced by local sheriffs and the occasional touring judge, but all these types of lawmen are generally in the pockets of local bosses.

But none of this really defines the region. For that, you need to look at the heat. And the flies. Given these conditions, the local peasantry has developed a taste for broad-brimmed sombreros and big ponchos, under which they can catch a lot of siestas. They aren't so much lazy as sensibly comatose. Being poor, they only seem to shave every three or four days, and many have big moustaches.

Visiting?

This is, in many senses, classic mercenary-adventurer territory, if you can stand the heat. But visitors should be

warned; it's advisable to stay on the right side of the local bosses, who have numbers in their favour. This would be fine, except that many local bosses don't seem to *have* a right side. Best to keep riding on, trying to stay out of trouble . . .

Other visitors might include performance artists offered wonderful deals by agents who don't tell them that the new theatre or opera house is being built in the middle of nowhere by a raving lunatic, and isn't finished yet. Then there's the commercial opportunities; this is certainly classic snake-oil-salesman country. Likewise, rather low-grade gamblers are not exactly infrequent in these parts. And tourists might be persuaded of the region's unspoilt ethnic charm and colourful tradition of poncho-making.

The Village of Mallo Burro

Mallo Burro might be considered a classic backwoods-Brindisi village, albeit with a few more causes of trouble than most. It's near enough to main travel routes for wandering PCs to hear about it or even blunder through by chance, remote enough for the local problems to fester. One road -- well, a broad, dusty trail -- passes through, and local ranches and bean-patches support a population of a few hundred, a cantina, a blacksmith and a general store. (Oh, and a witch, of course.) Traders bring carts through every couple of weeks, trading anything that can't be made locally (including limes for the bar) for whatever can; they rarely stop long.

The village itself is dominated by one family, the Varozags. However, there is also a dwarf-run goldmine not far out of town, and the dwarfs somehow just don't get on with the Varozags. Furthermore, neither faction is excessively popular with the local peasantry, and all sorts of other trouble sometimes flares up.

Local Geography

Mallo Burro is strung out along the single road that passes through, with few buildings more than a few yards back; whenever anyone sites a new house or shop, there's usually nothing to stop them adding it to either end of the village, and few people, even in these parts, want a location with a view of the midden or junk-heap behind someone else's place. Take a left or right off the road and between two buildings, and you're soon in the wilderness.

North of the village, the land rises into an unremarkable but determinedly rocky set of mountains, and a poor trail leads up this way to the dwarf-mine. Travellers will need to cover slightly more than three miles of increasingly poor terrain; most will want to ride a mule. The mine entrance itself is marked by a plain "gateway" of rough but solid timbers, and there's usually a couple of dwarfs around with axes and picks to greet any visitors (usually by telling them to go away).

South-west of the village, and less than half a mile away, one finds a mesa -- a steep-sided lump of volcanic rock sticking up out of the desert, with a flat top a few hundred yards across. The mesa dominates the village visually, but few people find much reason to climb up it; nothing much grows here. Thus, the locals tend to forget that there is in fact a structure of sorts up there; an old circle of granite slabs, somewhat worn down by wind-blown sand but still all standing. Their history and purpose are effectively forgotten, although some older peasants may be able to say something.

Incidentally, the landscape in these parts is dotted with cacti. One species contains a sour-sweet pulp that can be fermented and then distilled to produce a drink. (It has to be a drink; the Disc doesn't have much use for battery acid in its present state of technology. Most local peasants prefer beer, which may or may not have a slice of lime stuck in the neck of the bottle.)

The Varozag Clan and the Dwarfs

Mallo Burro's ruling family are the Varozags; in full, the family name is "de Varozag de La Lala." They occupy a rather grand three-storey house at one end of the village, usually emerging in groups of two or three family members

and about as many servants and hangers-on, to supervise their cattle ranch and push the peons around. The head of the clan, Don Dominguito de Varozag de La Lala, is said to be in his late sixties, and to be a huge bull of a man with a really impressive moustache, a will of iron, a foul temper, and a vast capacity for alcohol. However, hardly anyone knows for sure, as he hasn't been seen by anyone outside the family (apart from one fanatically loyal serving-woman) for decades. He supposedly holes up at the top of his house, issuing peremptory commands to his relatives. Some cynical local peasants secretly think that he has been dead for years, and that "Don Dominguito orders it!" has become the family's all-purpose excuse for some increasingly eccentric and sometimes vicious policies.

The truth behind these whispers is left to the GM to determine; an encounter with Don Dominguito (live -- or stuffed, as a few peasants suspect) should come as the confused climax of a long scenario. However, the Varozags do actually have one big secret that *no-one* suspects; a dash of elf-blood in their ancestry.

The story behind this is forgotten, and the genes are now thinned out enough that the only signs are that family members are pale by Brindisian standards, with a slight tendency to pointed ears, good looks, and fashion sense -- and sometimes, a definite streak of inventive cruelty. The Varozags all wear dashing-but-baggy clothes (often silk) and stylish broad-brimmed hats (*not* sombreros) which they pull down low. They usually marry members of other noble families, many with similar secrets, who they meet on infrequent trips to larger towns; those who marry into the family are chosen for their similar attitudes and manners, and soon fit in. However, the Varozags do sometimes emit an unintended, indefinable aura, which certain others may unconsciously notice over the years.

This is one reason why the family doesn't get on with the dwarfs who moved into the local mountains about fifty years ago, when a decent vein of gold showed up. Another is simply that the family wants to control everything in this area, and the dwarfs don't want to be controlled. A third is that these dwarfs are surly even by their species' standards -- something to do with wearing chainmail and metal helmets day and night in a desert climate -- and don't get on with anyone much. From the peasants' point of view, at least a Varozag will acknowledge your existence, even if they make it clear that you exist only to clean their boots; they rather like attention. The dwarfs, by contrast, rarely talk to anyone they aren't buying from or selling to.

The "king" of the mine, Norrin Nuggetsbane, is a walking definition of words like "dour" and "monosyllabic," but he is also a competent tactician and a very effective long-term planner; actually, the biggest problem is that his plans are often a century out of date by the time they come to a head. He is currently working to persuade traders to come direct to the mine, so that he doesn't have to send his people down to the village to buy supplies; his eventual idea is to cut the Varozags' ranch off from outside business. He simply doesn't care what this will do to Mallo Burro.

For a typical member of the Varozag family, use ST 10, DX 12 (or higher), IQ 10, HT 10, and skill around 12-16 in various refined weapons. Their loyal thugs are about ST 14, DX 11, IQ 9, HT 11, with skills of about 12-14 in Brawling and Axe/Mace. Dwarf miners mostly have their racial package plus a point or two of extra ST or HT, Axe/Mace-15, and decent levels in mining-related skills. Obviously, individual members of any of these groups may vary somewhat.

Local Characters

Ninairara, "La Bruja"

ST 9, DX 11, IQ 14, HT 12

Advantages: Fully Literate, Magery +2, Reputation (+2 in Mallo Burro), Status +1.

Disadvantages: Hunchback, Overweight, Sense of Duty (All Peasants), Struggling Wealth, Truthfulness.

Quirks: Dislikes spiders, Loud laugh, Nosy about people, Thinks that colourful ponchos are really *cool*.

Skills: Animal Handling-11, Area Knowledge (Mallo Burro)-14, Brawling-12, Cooking-14, Fast-Talk-16, Naturalist-14, Physician-15, Psychology-14, Savoir-Faire (Backwoods Brindisi)-16, Shouting at Foreigners-14, Veterinary-14.

Languages: Brindisian (native)-14, Ankhian-12.

Spells: Beast-Soother-15, Borrowing-14, Englebert's Enhancer-15, Find Weakness-14, Foolishness-16, Lend Strength-17, Morphic Tweaking-20, Persuasion-16, Purify Water-15, Seek Water-14, Sense Emotion-14, Sense Foes-14, Sense Life-14.

Mallo Burro's resident witch is relatively youthful and inexperienced, but is a typically determined member of her profession. In these parts, that profession requires her to wear a big patterned sombrero with a pointy tip; given her build, hunched back, and taste for garish ponchos, she cuts an unmistakable figure.

Although she is not violent or malicious, she doesn't like taking backchat from anyone, and she is rather unsubtle by witch standards. She knows something of Borrowing, but she is not especially good at it; she secretly slightly enjoys using Morphic Tweaking, usually turning annoying people into small sand-lizards. In any encounter with PCs, she is likely to size them up and then do whatever is necessary to protect her village from the worst of any trouble. She can be a helpful ally, if approached carefully, for her medical skills if nothing else.

Don Gavaroz de Varozag de la Lala, "El Aguila del Cubo"

ST 11, DX 16, IQ 10, HT 11

Advantages: Attractive Appearance, Ambidexterity, Fully Literate, Status +2.

Disadvantages: Delusion ("My identity is secret, thanks to this mask"), Gentleman's Code of Honour, Impulsiveness, Secret (Elf- Kin), Trademark: Initial-Carving ("DGDVDLLEADC").

Quirks: Always wears black, Flamboyant swashbuckler, Keeps trying to carve his initials in combat, Likes the admiration of the lower classes, Prone to sunburn (wears a broad-brimmed hat and baggy shirt for protection).

Skills: Acrobatics-14, Brawling-15, Climbing-15, Dancing-15, Fast-Talk-8, Fencing-18, Jumping-15, Knife-16, Riding (Horse)-15, Running-10, Savoir-Faire (Brindisi)-12, Stealth-16, Whip-15.

Languages: Brindisian (native)-10, Ankhian-8.

The black (or perhaps white) sheep of the Varozag family is a younger son, whose idea of a way to spend his time is to dress up in black silk, a broad-brimmed hat (pulled low), and a nifty little black eye-mask, swagger around the area with a fencing sabre and a whip, and declare himself the protector of the local peasants. Sometimes, he actually does some good; the shrewder peasants are beginning to realise that if their more fetching daughters make eyes at him a bit, he'll do almost anything they ask, and there isn't even any serious immediate risk to the girls' virtue. The purpose of the eye-mask is a mystery; Don Gavaroz announces his identity whenever a dramatic scene seems called for, and keeps trying to carve his initials, including on opponents. (He rarely gets beyond "DG," and in any case a victim would surely pass out from loss of blood before he finished the job -- and Don Gavaroz is not a sadist, and stops when a victim is down -- but he doesn't stop hoping. There are rules for combat initial-carving in *GURPS Swashbucklers*, or just improvise some cumulative minuses to hit.)

Gavaroz should represent a loose cannon in events around Mallo Burro. His family think that he's going through a temporary phase; they won't kill him if he gets in the way of their plans, which happens (Gavaroz liking to think of himself as a rebel), but they'll certainly contrive to have him hit on the head and locked up for a month or six if necessary. They know how fast he is with that blade, and will allow for it.

The Dwarf With No Name

ST 13, DX 14, IQ 10, HT 13

(Attributes include bonuses from racial package.)

Advantages: Dwarf Package (with Dwarfish Greed), Combat Reflexes, Disease-Resistance.

Disadvantages: Addiction (Chain-Smoker), Code of Honour (Stays Bought), Odious Personal Habit (Very Laconic: -1 reactions), Stubbornness.

Quirks: Likes to play sides off against each other, Smokes thin cigars, Squints a lot, Wears a poncho *everywhere* (including bed).

Skills: Axe/Mace-14, Blacksmith-13, Brawling-15, Crossbow- 16, Fast-Draw (Arrow)-15, Fast-Draw (Knife)-15, Knife Throwing-15, Metallurgy-9, Prospecting-10, Riding (Mule)-12, Tactics-9.

(Skills include bonuses from Dwarf racial package and Combat Reflexes.)

Languages: Dwarfish (native)-10, Ankhian-9, Brindisian-8.

This dwarfish wanderer is *almost* as much of a poseur as Don Gavaroz, but more calculating and self-centred. He has nothing to do with the dwarfs up in the mountains; he just wandered into Mallo Burro recently, recognised this as a situation with potential, and decided to stay a while. However, he doesn't bother explaining himself, so there's a fair bit of speculation about his motives.

In fact, they're painfully simple. He has long since learned that some people -- humans and dwarfs -- will pay gold for combat skills. This suits him fine; he has a fairly low regard for life (aside from his own), although he's happy to be paid just to look threatening. But he's found that more gold tends to come available if there's actual fighting, so he encourages it. He's not very good at manipulating people yet, but he's learning; he'll certainly never tell anyone anything that might reduce a conflict. His dwarfish racial loyalty is low, although he would probably slightly favour his own kind if it didn't cost him anything.

He wears plain clothes and a poncho, which can conceal both his bronze breastplate and how heavily armed he is, to a casual glance; he also has a metal helmet (with a flat brim to shade his eyes). He carries a pistol crossbow (ST 5, 1d-3 impaling, SS 10, Acc 3), half-a- dozen daggers, and a couple of hatchets. If he makes a Fast-Draw roll, he can fire the crossbow every three rounds, but it doesn't do a lot of damage; in a fight, he mostly stands his ground, fires off one or two bolts, follows up with some fast-drawn throwing daggers, then wades in with a hatchet. (In melee, he's strong enough not to have to ready that between blows.)

Pedro the Undertaker

Mallo Burro's funeral director is also the village's chief carpenter and a general odd-job man; a village of this size doesn't usually see *very* many funerals. Pedro, however, has decided to do something about that, and he has little regard for human life and an instinct for trouble-making. If he's around and either a Varozag or a dwarf should say something about the other faction, he'll repeat it -- provided that it is, or can be twisted to sound, bad. However, he's also good at playing the humble peasant who doesn't understand what he's repeating, and at offering to make himself "useful." He's now looking at bigger schemes for encouraging open warfare around Mallo Burro, and he has become sort-of-friendly with The Dwarf With No Name.

He has IQ 12 and 10 in other attributes, along with Acting-14, Carpentry-14, Diplomacy-11, Fast-Talk-11, Professional Skill (Undertaker)-13, and Scrounging-12.

Jose the Barman

Quite likely the first resident of Mallo Burro who PCs will talk to is the proprietor and sole full-time staff of "*El Barra Donde La Gente Habla Lentamente*" -- the village bar (and its nearest thing to a hotel). Jose knows exactly how his job should be performed, and being slightly crazy is part of the image. Whenever a PC enters his establishment, he will be behind the bar, moving smears around with a dishcloth; he will look up, look back at a glass, look up again,

and loudly ask "What you want, gringo?"

Whatever they answer, he will announce loudly to the bar (even if it's empty); "Ha -- he say he wanna beer" (or whatever). Then he will lean conspiratorially across the bar, look at them slightly sideways, and ask loudly, "You wanna slice a *lime* in that?"

Again, whatever they answer, he will announce. ("He wanna slice of lime in it!"/"He no wanna slice of lime!") He can keep this up for hours. He's not worried what or how much customers drink -- he sells enough beers to the peasants to cover his costs -- but he is convinced that everyone should want to drink their chosen tippie straight out of the bottle, with a slice of lime jammed in the neck. Telling him that this is way out of date, or stupid, makes no difference; he will always offer. ("Ha! He say it stoopeed to hava slice a lime in it . . . ")

Jose is basically a normal, average character, but he does have an uncanny knack for diving behind his bar the moment trouble starts; as the place is actually full of secret escape-hatches and hiding- places, his survivability is good. (Really smart PCs may spot this, and extract his secrets from him for use in emergencies -- but this will take work. "You wanna secret door? You wanna slice a *lime* in it, maybe?") Treat him as having Combat Reflexes and Extraordinary Luck, along with full Literacy and the skills Bartender-16 and Stealth-15.

His bar is a classic western saloon/cantina, with double swing doors, adequate spittoons, and more bottles than should be economically viable.

Scenario Ideas

Getting to Mallo Burro

GMs can arbitrarily start PCs off in this location if they wish -- well, it'd be polite to tell the players something about it before they start generating characters -- but it's also possible to bring a pre-existing group to Mallo Burro. Reasons why PCs might be in this general area have already been discussed; Mallo Burro isn't so remote that getting them *here*, specifically, should be hard.

If the PCs are a traditional pack of hard-bitten adventurers -- dubious thugs who'd do most things for money -- it can be easy; they're hired. Who by, is a matter of taste; the Varozags are obvious candidates, especially if they decide to do something serious about those dwarfs. On the other hand, a more *traditional* option would be to have this assortment of mismatched combat merchants hired by the villagers, perhaps to deal with trouble from the Varozags, or to fend off bandits who the Varozags are just ignoring. The set-up should, of course, be run as a parody of those early scenes in *The Magnificent Seven*, if at all possible. But remember that this is the Discworld; the villagers know the unwritten rules at least as well as the players, and while they will play a certain amount by the book ("We are a poor veeleej, Senor . . . "), especially when it gives them a moral advantage over the PCs ("There no seven hof you? Seven ees traditional"), they want to avoid the worst stuff. Ninairara is likely to produce a *written* contract for them to sign, which will include a clause about not leading impressionable young villagers to dream of life as freelance mercenaries. Oh, and it will also specify, in the small print, that anyone who doesn't survive the job certainly doesn't get paid; if anyone spots that and asks, well, "If you get kill, gringo, you no much good at your job, hey?"

If the PCs are a bit less stereotyped, however, you'll probably have to work out a customised plot. (If they're *very* strange, you'll be used to that.) Hint at gold in the mountains. Link them up with a merchant who works this area. Get them jobs as touring freelance law enforcers for the Brindisian government. Have artistically-talented PCs hired by the Varozags to bring a bit of culture to the region. (The Varozags aren't totally sane, and are quite capable of deciding to build themselves an opera house.) Tell them they've inherited a ranch (actually ten thousand acres of tumbleweed) . . .

Of course, one small problem with this region is that troll PCs are fairly useless here, given the heat. If you *have* to bring such to Mallo Burro, have them master the fine art of taking siestas during the day (and they can wear some pretty impressive ponchos and sombreros), and let them lumber round at modest efficiency in the night.

The Dwarf in the Middle

The basic plot involving The Dwarf With No Name is, of course, highly derivative. (Sergio Leone borrowed it from a Japanese movie.) Thanks to some gentle prodding, tensions in Mallo Burro warm up from simmer to fast boil.

The PCs can either be hired, or persuaded by appeals to their better natures, to protect the villagers from collateral damage. Alternatively, they can be employed by the Varozags or the dwarfs to fight in their war; if they have any traces of conscience, they should eventually realise that they are mixed up in a futile and messy struggle. Unfortunately, trying to calm things down by appeals to reason will achieve little; each side *wants* to fight, and has heard vague rumours that the other has been saying some nasty things. Furthermore, whichever side has currently hired The Dwarf is finding him invaluable -- and his monosyllabic suggestions won't involve the word "peace."

Mallo Burro is full of swaggering thugs hired by the Varozags; *El Barra* is being smashed up so often that Jose's ingenuity and savings are taking a battering, he's almost run out of limes, and a lot of peasants are being maltreated. Don Gavaroz is actually doing some good, for once, which means that his family will soon catch him and lock him away for the duration; if the PCs need some extra skills and combat capability, getting him free could be a smart idea.

The dwarfs are less blatantly troublesome -- at first. However, they are *planning*. Specifically, they are building a set of siege engines that could punch holes through a mountain. If and when these are deployed, they will be aimed at the Varozag mansion; unfortunately, their operators will regard other human buildings that lie in the way as expendable. A climactic scene should probably involve sabotage and its spectacular consequences, if possible.

Grey Import

The stone circle up on the mesa is more than just a natural formation. And late one morning, someone shows up who can do something with it. A mule shambles into town carrying a scrawny, absent-minded young man in what appears to be a white night-shirt.

This is Dafydd, a Llamedosian programmer. He found references to some early Strict Druidic missionary efforts in some dusty records, deduced the probable existence of this legacy system, and guessed that it can be re-booted and upgraded to modern standards. And its power is sufficient to control the weather, as well as predicting astronomical events. (Throw in some double-talk about butterflies and quantum, if anyone asks him to explain.)

When they have worked out what he's talking about, the villagers will regard this as an interesting idea. The region has little, unreliable rainfall, and the last few years have been particularly bad ("which ees why we are a poor veeleej, Senor"). But there *are* vague stories from folks' grandfathers' days of better weather, thanks to gringos in night-dresses. If this druidic computer can be restored to operation, that would be wonderful. The PCs (who might have fallen in with Dafydd on the road, if they weren't already in Mallo Burro) should hopefully get caught up in the enthusiasm. The Varozags and the dwarfs ignore all this, unless provoked.

And Dafydd, having examined the circle, will announce that he *can* get it to work. It will need a small hardware upgrade to run modern software -- just a couple of small slabs of rock, nothing the village can't afford. Very observant PCs *may* note that he largely ignores the flat slab in the centre of the circle; if asked, he will refer to it as the "Central Processing Unit," shrug, and say that it's not needed for this application.

The thing which Dafydd has neglected to mention (for all sorts of reasons) is that, well, there's these people who'd like to have a word with him. Other druids, to be specific. The problems start when they show up.

There are several of them, accompanied by a bunch of hired bandidos (similar to the Varozags' thugs); they may also hire The Dwarf With No Name. They include some burly assistant priests who are handy in a fight (treat sickles as shortswords or broadswords, but with no option to stab), and one or two senior figures with some knowledge of their own branch of magic -- say, half-a-dozen spells, drawn from the Elemental Colleges, especially Fire.

Catching Dafydd is their initial concern, but will be partly forgotten when they notice the circle. It's a *good* circle, and

they too want to bring it back on line. The snag is, they are devotees of a more traditional school of programming methodology.

They, too, can improve the weather locally, they say, and the villagers may be tempted to listen to them, especially if they capture Dafydd or he goes into hiding. The snag is, they not only demand that the villagers convert to Strict Druidism (complete with male voice choirs), they *do* want to reactivate the Central Processing Unit. Which is supposed to be used for good old-fashioned sacrifices. If Dafydd can be asked, he'll turn a bit green, and say that *he* can get the circle running without that sort of unpleasantness, but this sort of disagreement about tradition is the kind of thing that led him to leave home.

The PCs' task now is to get rid of the Strict Druids, despite their large support-group of bandidos, and rescue Dafydd if necessary. With a sufficiently shameless GM, this scenario should involve a terrifying clash of hideously stereotyped accents; remember, the locals call everyone "Senor" (or "Senorita") or "Gringo," while the Llamedosians favour "Boyo" and begin or end most sentences "look you." Given the background of a lot of RPG'ers, you can expect plenty of computer jokes, too. There will probably also be sacrificial victims chained to the CPU, and the occasional unprovoked male voice choir.

And if the stone circle does get brought back partially on-line, things can get a bit weird, especially if anyone's using magic; basically, the GM can temporarily modify the local mana level to something silly. Triggering a full-scale thunderstorm can throw confusion into a final fight scene; you should probably have Dafydd running circles round the mesa through it all, desperately hacking up *ad hoc* chants while dodging lightning bolts that all seem to have his name on them. And if Ninairara somehow got chosen as an early candidate for the CPU, *someone* is going to get turned into a sand-lizard.



by Royce Easton Day

Teal paused at the end of the shuttle's loading ramp, her knees suddenly weak. The familiar corridors of the slow-light transport, so much like the crowded warrens of Earth, were gone. She stood now in an open space bigger than the largest Green Space back home, with a ceiling (the sky, she told herself) higher than anything she'd ever seen.

A warning honk from the cargo loader made her jump off the ramp to stand on the shuttleport's tarmac. She turned around, drinking in the open, unfiltered, pure air. Then she stopped, pausing in confusion.

"Now where do I go?" she said aloud.

* * *

Space colonies have been a staple of science fiction since its literary beginnings. From the eager Ganymede Boy Scouts of Heinlein's *Farmer in the Sky*, to the stranded, Thread-threatened colonials of McCaffrey's *Dragonsdawn*, colonists exploring and exploiting their new homes have provided the plots and settings for numerous books.

While most space-based RPGs have rules on how to generate planets and cultures, it's rare to find one that details how those worlds were colonized. This article builds on the ideas provided in ["Thoughts of Empire."](#) and provides GMs with guidelines on how to set up a campaign set on a single colony world, and how to involve PCs in carving out a whole new civilization.

Building the Colony

Following the guidelines of Thoughts of Empire, a GM preparing a colonial campaign should figure out what sort of group, business or government is sponsoring the colony. Then he should fill in the details of what the planet's ecosystem is geology is like, using the world building rules in *GURPS Space* or *GURPS Traveller: First In*.

After that there are just a few more vital questions that should be answered before starting a colonial campaign.

How settled and explored is the world?

A significant factor for PCs is how "tamed" the colony is. If the PCs are part of a pathfinder group, paving the way for settlers to land, they may know next to nothing about the planet's ecosystem and unique hazards. If they're part of a later group, the area around their landing site might be quite hospitable, but a mile outside of town they might be walking into untamed wilderness.

A well-explored world might give them more warning, but surprises can still abound. As an example, much of the

Earth was mapped and civilized by the mid-19th century, but there were still large patches where no human being had ever set foot. And even on a world mapped completely by satellites, there will still be a need for people walk the ground to make sure it's safe for the farmers.

How much support do the PCs get from the local government?

This usually related to the amount of support the sponsoring group gives the colony. Well-funded governments or corporations will be able to hand out fair loans, or lend heavy equipment vital to constructing a colony. Wildcat colonies with little outside support might just give newly landed greenhorns an axe, and point them in the direction of the trees so they can build their own log cabin.

Are there natives on this world?

What if, when the colonists arrive, they find out that someone was there first? Natives may consist of primitive aborigines, or possessors of a sophisticated culture. It's likely that they'll probably be of a significantly lower tech level than the colonists; otherwise why would they allow intruders on their world? An exception might be made if the colonists are able to exploit a region that the natives consider incredibly hostile (a desert, for example) on a planet where the natives evolved in a rain-forest environment.

As a quick look at British or American colonial history will show, natives are an enormous complication. Depending on the attitudes of the colonists and the sophistication of the natives, the end result might be an at least marginally beneficial meeting of cultures (like the British in New Zealand and India) or a painful series of broken treaties and shattered tribes (the American colonists versus Native Americans).

Remember that the natives will have a separate agenda from the colonists, and may not be above exploiting the colonists' presence for their own purposes. If there are multiple native governments on the planet, there will probably be at least one willing to trade native wealth for high tech goods that will give them a technological or military advantage.

Characters

Some of the more common types of characters that might be found in a colonial campaign are . . .

Administrator

Unless a colony is under the direct control of a military commander, the colony's homeworld will usually assign civilians to keep things in the colony organized. A fair and just administration will usually keep things running smoothly. But if the colony's administration is notably unfair or corrupt, it's going to be a flash-point for colonist's grievances and anger.

Advantages: Administrative Rank, Common Sense, Legal Enforcement Powers, Strong Will, Wealth.

Disadvantages: Dishonest Administrators might have Addiction (various), Alcoholism, Enemy (Disgruntled colonists), Greed, Reputation (corrupt). Honest Administrators are more likely to have Code of Honor (Treat colonists and natives fairly), Enemy (Back-stabbing subordinates), Honesty, Sense of Duty (Colony).

Skills: Accounting, Administration, Area Knowledge (Colony), Computer Operation, Leadership, Politics, Savoir Faire.

Con Man

Where there are tenderfoot colonists, there are the men that prey on them. Con men do everything they can to avoid doing an honest living, from scamming newly arrived tenderfoots in a card game, to convincing them to pay outrageous fees for bogus "land grants."

Advantages: Alcohol Tolerance, Appearance, Charisma, Sanctity.

Disadvantages: Compulsive Carousing, Enemy (Local Lawmen), Greed, Overconfidence, Reputation (Crook), Poor or Struggling.

Skills: Acting, Fast Talk, Forgery, Gambling, Sex Appeal, Slight of Hand, Streetwise.

Homesteader

Homesteaders traveled vast distances to this new world, just to get a little piece of land to call their own, usually to farm, or perhaps to extract important resources. For a completely virgin planet, a homesteader may be allowed to own as much land as he can prove he or his family can exploit. For worlds with a more restrictive land use policy, he may be limited to owning a set number of hectares. Adventures for a homesteader will revolve around clearing his land of dangerous predators, or keeping it safe from land barons.

Advantages: Ally Group (Family members, local co-op), Animal Empathy, Common Sense, Weather Sense.

Disadvantages: Dependants (family), Duty to the local bank, Enemy (rival farmers, land barons), Struggling or Poor.

Skills: Accounting, Animal Handling, Driving (Heavy Machinery), Meteorology, Professional Skill - Agronomy, Riding.

Law Enforcer

The local sheriff of a new colony world has a big job in front of him. He's got large territories of land that are nearly empty except for the occasional farmhouse to protect, and he must also keep order in the Startown, which is usually full of gullible tenderfoots, and the lowlifes that prey on them. He may also run into the occasional professional criminal on the run from more civilized law officers on other worlds.

Advantages: Alertness, Ally group: deputies, Contacts, Empathy, Intuition, Legal Enforcement Powers.

Disadvantages: Bully, Enemy (Local crooks), Sense of Duty (Community).

Skills: Forensics, Beam Weapon or Gun (Pistol), Intimidation, Interrogation, Shadowing, Streetwise.

Missionary

Where there are natives on a colony world, there will also be missionaries, trying to convince the poor benighted primitives to change their spiritual path to one of righteousness. Though often seen as a participant in colonial oppression throughout history, a missionary can also serve as a mediator between colonists who want to overrun native lands, and the natives who will fight tooth and nail to preserve it. They also may be the only people willing to teach native sophonts what they need to know to survive and integrate with the growing colonial populace.

Advantages: Charisma, Clerical Investment, Sanctity, Voice.

Disadvantages: Disciplines of Faith, Enemy (Native shaman), Fanaticism, Stubbornness.

Skills: Bard, Diplomacy, Fast Talk, Teacher, Theology.

Scientist

Biologists, meteorologists, ecologists, and all other manner of -ologists will be needed if the hazards of a new colony world are to be understood. Biologists and physicians will have to make certain that local plants and animals are not poisonous to humans. Ecologists will examine the ecosystem to make certain clearing land for farming won't fatally disrupt a vital chain of life. Xenoculturalists will want to speak to the natives to try and examine their unique way of life, and perhaps discover what the newcomers can learn from it.

Advantages: Alertness, Focused, Intuition.

Disadvantages: Absentmindedness, Curiosity, Hidebound ("That fits no accepted theory!").

Skills: Any Science skill, except for Science!, which is inappropriate except for high adventure style campaigns. Computer Operation, Electronics Operation (sensors), Research, Writing.

Soldier

Where there's trouble, the soldiers are there. They may be assigned to a fort defending a new community deep in native territory, or they may be defending a town from vicious native organisms. Combat engineers may be asked to build dikes to guard a farm against a raging river, or build a bridge to allow the colony to expand across it.

Usually soldiers will be made up of a local militia, with a core of ex-professionals acting as a cadre to train colonials from more civilian occupations. Some homeworlds may assign a company or more of professional soldiers, either to defend against native & outside threats, or (in the case of more repressive governments) to keep colonists from feeling too free.

Advantages: Alertness, Ally Group (Buddies in the unit), Combat Reflexes, Fit, Hard to Kill, Peripheral Vision, Toughness.

Disadvantages: Duty, Sense of Duty (Unit). Militias badly in need of personnel may allow soldiers with physical handicaps, particularly if they bring some unique skill.

Skills: Beam Weapons or Gun (rifle), Driving (AFV), Engineering (combat), Pilot (usually Helicopter or Grav Vehicles), Strategy, Tactics.

Tenderfoot

When a colonist from a technically advanced world first lands on a newly founded colony, he's likely to be woefully short on basic survival skills. Just finding a meal and shelter may be a major adventure, unless more experienced colonists take this tenderfoot under wing.

Advantages: Luck, Pitiabile, Wealth.

Disadvantages: Clueless, Curiosity, Klutz, Odius Personal Habit (Always asking questions), Phobia (Open spaces).

Skills: Any related to their life on back on the homeworld.

Transportee

Not everyone comes to a colony voluntarily. Criminals or "undesirable elements" may be shipped to a new world to provide slave labor. Sometimes their term of service is for life, but more often they are only required to serve out their sentence, and then are assigned a small parcel of land. Whatever their eventual fate, transportees are usually assigned the most hazardous jobs. Some may try to escape, and depending on the magnitude of their original crime they might be hunted down, or allowed to settle down far from the colony's center.

The next step up from a transportee is an indentured servant. Indentured servants agree to work for someone else, in return for transport to the colony. Usually they are released from their obligation after a set number of years, though less scrupulous patrons might try and enslave indentured servants permanently.

Advantages: Fit, Immunity to Disease, Strong Will, Toughness.

Disadvantages: Bad Luck, Enemy (Owner), Involuntary Duty, Social Stigma (Criminal or 'Undesirable').

Skills: Any Thief/Spy. Almost any other skill is possible, particularly if the transportee is innocent of the crime they were convicted of.

Trailblazer

Trailblazers aren't merely scouts, though that's a large part of the job. Orbital surveys can give a good idea of where the fruitful land is on a planet, but it's up to the Trailblazer to walk in, find and neutralize what hazards are in the area, identify safe sources of water, and locate convenient natural resources. They'll also be the most likely people to make first contact with the native population, if there is any. Though they work closely with scientists when examining new lands, it's the trailblazer's opinion which will often determine if settlers will be allowed into the area.

Often a trailblazer operates on the fringe of the colony's society, opening up the frontier for settlers, but never staying long when 'civilization' starts to move in.

Advantages: Alertness, Danger Sense, Intuition, Luck.

Disadvantages: Loner, Phobia: Crowds or Enclosed Spaces, Shyness, Wanderlust.

Skills: Any Survival, Area Knowledge, Electronics Operation: Sensors

Campaigning

The following are some ideas for long term campaigning on a colony world.

First Landing

Character Types: Homesteaders, Trailblazers, Scientists, Soldiers.

Somebody has to carve out a safe haven on this planet, and you're the folks stuck with the job. Adventures will probably revolve around a team exploring a small but completely unknown area, removing potential hazards that might threaten the large number of colonists that will be landing soon, and creating suitable shelters for them to inhabit until their homesteads can be explored and settled.

Explorers

Character Types: Trailblazers, Scientists, Soldiers.

Lewis & Clark had just a continent to explore; you've got a whole planet! If the adventurers are lucky, they'll have orbital photos of the areas they have to explore. But they still have to come down to the ground and take samples. Adventures will revolve around searches for badly needed raw materials, examining native life forms, or evaluating land to see if it's suitable for turning into much needed farmland.

If there are native sophonts, the PCs may be responsible for 'first contact' of isolated tribes, offering to trade goods (or just offering good will) in return for the colonists' right to move in. Their acts of initial diplomacy may be the deciding factor on whether the colonists will be welcome, or fought at every turn.

Spreading the Faith

Character Types: Missionaries.

There are heathen natives all over the planet, and its the PCs' job to bring the word of God (or the Goddess, or Mohammed, or Vishnu) to these poor unenlightened folk. This can be played as dead serious (perhaps the natives are wracked by warfare, and only a message of peace and brotherhood can stop the fighting), or comedic (imagine a group of cultists trying to convince the local chief to embrace their crazy doctrines).

Going by the history of our own world, missionary work can range from the benevolent construction of hospitals to treat natives with high-tech medicine, to the wholesale by-the-sword conversions of entire nations. Perhaps the missionaries may find their own faith challenged by the natives' beliefs (read James Blish's classic *A Case of Conscience* for the strife that might bring).

At any rate, considering the touchiness of religious subjects, if a GM or his players are not comfortable with this type campaign, it would be far better to avoid it.

Keeping the Peace

Character Types: Law Enforcers, Soldiers.

It's a big beat to walk, but somebody has to keep things safe for colonists just trying to build a home for themselves. It's up to the PCs to maintain the rule of law in an area where there was no law previously, or where the law up until now was "Survival of the Fittest."

Colonies that were founded by mid-level CR governments will probably try to put into place a rational set of laws as soon as the colonists arrive, to be enforced by trained police officers. CR 5 or 6 governments will also make sure the rule of law is place, but it will most likely be enforced by some very heavy-handed methods, probably by soldiers who've never heard of Miranda rights. More libertarian governments may enforce few, if any, laws at all, depending on the colonists to decide for themselves what behavior they're willing to put up with.

If there are natives on the world, it will be up to the PCs to prevent colonists from accidentally, or deliberately, violating local customs, and invoking the natives' wrath. Alternatively, they might have to be the ones to arrest the local high priest, after he sacrifices some poor farmer's entire herd of cattle to the Rain God.

Unless local conditions force the colony into a confined area, a single lawman's beat will be measured in hundreds of square miles. He may spend days patrolling his sector, visiting individual farms to check up on people, or perhaps just stay in his office and wait for an emergency call on the radio. At any rate, the local sheriff may be the only form of government an isolated colonist might see for years at a time.

Rebellion!

Character Types: Homesteaders, Law Enforcers, Soldiers.

When, in the course of human events . . .

Maybe it was the last round of tax increases on the colony's exports. Maybe it was the way the Imperial Guard drove farmers from their homesteads to create a new bombing range. Maybe it was just time for a change. For whatever reason, the average citizen of the colony is no longer willing to put up with be governed by a homeworld government that just doesn't seem to care. He's willing to take up arms against soldiers of his distant masters and fight for the colony's independence.

Adventures will revolve around sabotage, stealing and hiding much needed weapons, and gathering intelligence on the occupation troops. If off-world travel is available, PCs might have to try and contact other governments, trying to garner support and recognition for their cause in the arena of interstellar politics.

Alternatively, the rebellion may come from the native population (if any). This sort of war will be of the nastiest sort, as the natives use their inherent knowledge of the local terrain and lifeforms to wreak the maximum amount of havoc as they try to drive away the off-worlders.

Startown Blues

Character Types: Administrators, Con Men, Law Enforcers, Tenderfoots.

Rather than concentrate on exploration, a campaign could easily revolve around the small-town politics and crime of the local starport and town. An expanding colony will always be filled with tenderfoots to shepherd, con men to prey on them, and law enforcers to keep the peace. Administrators will have to work hard to balance the needs of the expanding colony with the demands of the homeworld, and limited resources. Con men can spend their time either fleecing newcomers, or perhaps 'procuring' high demand manufactured items from the shuttleport's warehouse. For a price, of course.

The Transcontinental Monorail!

Character Types: Administrators, Soldiers, Transportees, Trailblazers.

Even if a colony has air transportation, planes or grav vehicles are expensive to maintain, and perhaps impossible to build if the colony has limited manufacturing resources. Building a safe and reliable ground transportation network will go a long way toward 'civilizing' the planet.

Of course difficult terrain and hostile natives won't make things easy. And if the monorail has to go through land already claimed by homesteaders, the colony's administration might have to either find a way to placate the farmers, or prepare to fight a guerrilla war against them.

Recommended Reading

Fiction

- *Foreigner* trilogy, C.J. Cherryh. An isolated human colony must deal with sophisticated alien natives, trading advanced technology for resources. Very good for ideas on native/colonist politics and alien thought.
- *Deathworld*, Harry Harrison: A con artist in trouble runs offworld, to a colony with a literally malicious ecosystem. Two sequels deal with equally hostile worlds.
- "Asgard" short stories, Daniel Hatch. Independent homesteaders fight a political battle to avoid being sucked into a greedy collective.
- *Farmer in the Sky*, Robert A. Heinlein. A Boy Scout and his family travel to their new home on Ganymede.
- *Red Planet*, Robert A. Heinlein. A brother and sister attending a boarding school on Mars fight for their world's independence.
- *Uller Uprising*, H. Beam Piper. Human colonists must fight a native uprising, in a re-telling of India's Sepoy Rebellion.

Non-Fiction

- *Undaunted Courage*, Steven Ambrose. A biography of Meriwether Lewis, one half of the Lewis & Clark Expedition. Read it to get a feel for the sense of wonder a virgin world might hold for explorers.
- *The Fatal Shore* Robert Hughes. The story of the colonization of Australia, with an emphasis on the large convict population. Worth reading for ideas on prison colonies, but not for the squeamish.

Television

- *Earth 2*. Occasionally improbable tale of a pathfinder group who land on their new home world short of equipment and a long way from their chosen landing site. Currently re-running on the Sci-Fi Channel in the US.
- *Red Planet*. A four-episode animated serial produced by Fox Television, loosely based on Heinlein's original novel, with an occasionally heavy-handed eco-message. Worth watching for details on "New Ares" ecology.

Movies

- *Outland*. Sean Connery stars in a re-make of *High Noon*, set in an enclosed mining colony on the moon Io in orbit around Jupiter. Watch it for ideas about small town politics and crime around Startown.

"Bill"

For *Vampire: The Masquerade*

by Ben Vandgrift

Some people lurk in dark corners. Some people seem to bring the dark corners with them. You can bet that someone that deep in shadows knows their way around in the Dark.

History

Wrong place, wrong time. Happens to us all at some point. For a switchboard operator in Lowell, MA, it happened after his shift one night.

"It was especially dark after the evening shifts on weekdays, when the factories had been spitting up ash into the air all day long. The only real light came from the gas lamps spaced too far apart. Ah, for the streets of Boston, or even New Haven. Even then Boston was putting up Edison's electric lights along its streets. While I knew eventually they would spread everywhere, patience had never been a virtue I possessed."

Times were definitely changing. National Bell had become American Bell, and A.G. Bell, who'd founded the company, was just awarded his citizenship to the United States. There were telephone networks arising in California, Connecticut, New York, and Massachusetts, and the life of one of those responsible for their success was about to change.

Raymond Miller was a gifted technician and scientist before he was recruited. While Lowell wasn't the booming industrial city that Boston was, it did a fair amount of manufacturing, and nestled between the soot-covered factories and warehouses was the budding American Bell company. The labs and experimental areas within the building were Raymond's home. Sure, he had a flat on Shaw, but he didn't have much in the way of family. He preferred the company of his tools and wires to his lonely apartment.

Miller's mind was brilliant, grasping the concepts of networks and interchanges quickly and easily. He worked with several other technicians to develop the prototypes which were turned into switchboards, had extended Dr. Parker's ideas about phone numbers into something usable, and had just begun work on more complex networking scenarios. To help out the company he worked the switchboards after his shift. He became familiar with most of the influential people in Lowell, Boston, and the region, switching them from one connection to another. That, combined with his knowledge of the telephone system was what attracted *their* attention.

"I could hear my bones crackling under my skin, reshaping themselves into something vile. My skull ached, and the least light burned and blinded. I had no idea what I was becoming, but I knew that the pain would stay with me for the rest of my life. If what I'd been told was to be believed, that would be a long time indeed."

As Raymond walked home one night, he was accosted by two men whom he'd mistaken for bums. When he held out his hand to give some change over, they dragged him into an alley and killed him. A few hours later, he arose as an

undead being, his life fueled by their blood.

The Nosferatu living under Boston and the region saw in Raymond an opportunity to catch up on quite a bit of lost technology. They recognized the potential that telephones had, and intended to use this potential in their own intelligence gathering methods.

"I stood there before him, their Master, still aching from my transformation. He chuckled at me, shaking in his dusty chair. Soon he explained his plan to me -- I was to keep learning my trade, and make sure that they could listen in. I thought to refuse, but you're no doubt well aware of how persuasive they can be." He looked aside, remembering. "Before the Boston-New York Line went up, we had the central board tapped. All calls to and from Boston were overheard by us from then on."

Resigned to his fate, he began to appreciate the information he was receiving. It allowed him the respect of his peers quite readily, and it wasn't long before he rose within the ranks. He was the first stop on anyone's list when it came to information.

By 1900, there were almost 900,000 phones in the Bell System. Raymond kept up with his colleagues, and helped advance the technology. He claimed extended sickness, and communicated by courier and telephone. Based on his ideas and former notes, the American Telephone and Telegraph company (which had bought out American Bell three years earlier) developed an automated switching exchange capable of handling 10,000 lines. With the increase in telephone traffic, Raymond stopped listening and set others at the task, monitoring their information at a much higher level.

Raymond had taken to calling himself "Bill." As the information transfer became more and more complex, he told his spooks to use the name "Bill" as well. To anyone outside their group, "Bill" appeared to be one person. Not even the other Nosferatu knew the whole truth.

"I've never had any interest in politics outside of information. I kept up with technology, and throughout the twentieth provided my superiors with better and better ways to gather information, most of the time without ever having to leave the tunnels. Each of them was most grateful -- right up until they tried to kill me."

With as much information and power that Bill had, many of his superiors became suspicious, and paranoid. They had a right to be. One after another, they tried to destroy Bill and all he had done. Each time, Bill knew before they got there, and dealt with them. The more his superiors fell, the more powerful he became.

At the beginning of the new millennium, Bill is a name of influence to those who know it. He has ceased to play in politics, since it is a game in which he has no competition. He does, however, make sure that he knows everything which is going on in Boston, and keeps a close eye on most of New England.

He has unfailingly kept up with his passion -- information technology. He understands communications hardware and software inside and out, and makes sure he is aware of all recent developments. He is extremely fond of cell phones, and has designed several firmware encryption implementations, which he passed on to Bell Labs, now Lucent Technologies. He maintains several contacts there, and a friend or two.

Personality

Bill is, even after all this, an easy-going guy. He fully plans to spend the rest of his days amusing himself. His voice is soft and polite, but extremely smug. He walks slow, and smiles often. He is often given to sentimental notions, but doesn't allow them to get in the way of his devices.

He usually appears as a tall, slim man with short black hair. This is exactly how Raymond looked in life, and allows himself this conceit. He was not an unattractive man, and looks quite smart in the businesslike clothes in which he dresses. His spooks appear much the same way, though some variation is inevitable. All answer to "Bill", and it is impossible to tell any of them apart.

Bill is very sly, whether someone is speaking to Raymond himself, or one of the spooks which serve under him. He will duck the point, change the subject, and provide half-truths unless he wants the information clear. Most of the time, Bill's words are a complex combination of deceit, the truth, and various points of view.

"I think I can help you," too many jagged teeth grinned under greasy locks. "In fact, I'm sure of it. I can get you right out of this mess you're in. You just have to make this delivery for me."

"What is it?" Ray looked suspiciously at the unmarked, cardboard box.

"It's your delivery. Don't worry. It's not for you."

Because of the many agents under Bill, he may appear to be several places at once. The agents are in constant communication and don't often make mistakes -- even when they do, they are able to change their appearance, or vanish into the night. In almost a century, very few have learned the true, multiple nature of Bill, and those who have haven't lived long enough to tell anyone about it. Bill will remain ever secretive, and treats every fact as though it were the most important, most occult knowledge on the planet. This too, is for his own amusement, not any real belief.

Gameplay

Bill is a good character to bring into a story, even if the player characters never see him. He always has an agenda, and is often in the position of kingmaker. Any plot can be disturbed by the kind of information, materials, and blackmail that Bill brings into play.

If the characters are stumped, Bill is good for helping them along. He will do so, of course, as a favor, and will expect a favor in return. He will always call his favors in at the worst possible time. Bill is also good for the reality check. Assume he knows all about the characters, like where they are, and their cell phone number. As a last resort, Bill can usually get people out of trouble. They don't even have to know. He could bring it up later.

Harry reached into the box and grabbed a slice of steaming double-pepperoni. As he pulled the cheese away from the rest of the pizza, he caught Jeannie's eye.

"What?"

"Something written on the inside of the box, I think," she said, reaching for a wedge.

Harry raised the lid and looked. "Dammit. How does he always know?"

As a villain, Bill is quite nasty, giving away critical information about the player characters, their friends and family,

and their allies to all the people who hate them. They get IRS audits, their credit cards get canceled, they find out they're legally dead. Bill's like that.

A character like Bill is usable in any genre. In a fantasy genre, he could be a high-placed member(s) of the thieves' guild. In the cyberpunk style, he could be incarnate in a group of net runners operating out of whatever city is appropriate. In a space setting, bring him as a diplomat or smuggler with too many contacts which always seem to be where you're going. Without his shape changing ability, he simply uses more common tactics to avoid detection (picture-phones, holo-belts, icon programs, etc.).

Allies and Contacts

While it may not be obvious, Bill does report back to a superior. He is not the leader of the Nosferatu, but he has almost complete autonomy, so long as he provides Warwick (that leader) with the information he requests. Neither Warwick nor Bill are confident enough to challenge the other, and Bill is content with his half-dozen or so spooks.

As you can imagine, many people dislike Bill, but even more have a grudging respect, even dependency on his information. Most of the undead in Boston owe Bill at least one favor. If they don't, Bill will arrange for them to owe him a favor. However, with that comes the knowledge that he exists, something he is loathe to reveal.

Bill doesn't have any real friends, but he does have a few allies. Derek Terran, a mage of some note in Boston, has sided with Bill several times. Theodore St. Devian, a student of Derek's, also appreciates Bill's talents. Most of the Broken Seal Chantry, which Derek and Astor Eldridge lead, has had a run-in with Bill, either covering their tracks or providing them with useful information. He does this mostly as a favor to Derek, but they have come to trust Bill's information (when they can decipher it).

Det. Randall Casey, of the 23d precinct in Boston has likewise come to rely in Bill's information. Bill still has a sense of justice, and Casey knows more about the shadows than most of the good men of the Boston PD.

Clan: Nosferatu

Haven: The Sewers and Tunnels under Boston, MA

Generation: 7th

Nature/Demeanor: Jester/Architect

Attributes: Strength/3, Dexterity/4, Stamina/4, Charisma/3, Manipulation/5, Appearance/0, Perception/5, Intelligence/6, Wits/4

Skills of Note: Bill has an in depth knowledge of all things electronic, especially communications equipment. He has studied a fair amount in his spare time, having a basic grasp on the sciences. He also speaks several languages: English, German, Russian, Japanese, Arabic, Hebrew, Greek. He can read Latin.

He is very alert, and pays attention. He also has good instincts, and can see through most deceptions. He is a good leader, and has an excellent sense of timing.

In a fight, Bill will run. He values his existence, and will protect it at all times. This rarely comes up, however, as Bill is very good at knowing what's going on, and will avoid or divert the scene before things become violent.

Willpower: 8

Disciplines: Celerity/3, Fortitude/4, Animalism/3, Potence/2, Auspex/3, Dominate/3, Presence/2

In The Belly Of The Beast (for d20)

Published by [Atlas Games](#)

Written by Mike Mearls



Illustrated by Helena Wickberg, David Interdonato, Chris Seaman, and Scott Reeves

32 pages; \$8.95

In The *Belly Of The Beast* is the third entry in the Penumbra series of *d20* scenarios from Atlas Games. It is designed for four to six characters of second through fourth levels, though it is specifically aimed at third level characters.

As per the previous two Penumbra adventures, *In The Belly Of The Beast* is a 32-page book. It is clearly laid out, with the Open Gaming License material plainly contained in grey boxes. The artwork is also attractive, in particular the tentacularly themed sidebars from Scott Reeves and the character pieces by David Interdonato. The thumbnail portraits of the adventure's NPCs are a little rough, but they do convey the personality of each rather well. *Belly of the Beast* also makes use of ProFantasy Software's *Campaign Cartographer 2* to design its single map. As with the other Penumbra adventures, this map can be downloaded from the Atlas Games website.

Importantly, a quarter of this module is actually an eight-page pull-out special section. This includes not just the map, but also the adventure's single handout and details of the eleven important NPCs in the adventure, including their game stats, background and motivations. It is rounded out with a table to help run all of these NPCs though any combats that might occur during the final encounter.

The plot revolves around the merchant House of Mezzia, whose fortunes have been flagging of late. Bruno, the son of the head of House Mezzia, hires the PCs to help restore his family's fortunes by performing a number of tasks for him. After a small job to test their mettle, Bruno explains that he knows who is responsible the downturn in the luck of House Mezzia. He identifies a dark shadowy conspiracy to be found within the city and says that he wishes to strike a blow at them. Leading the way, Bruno sets out to attack the very heart of this conspiracy, so taking the players into the final encounter.

Everything in *Belly of the Beast* is geared towards getting the party into this final encounter. It places Bruno and the party in a closed room situation. Initially unable to escape, the players will quickly discover that they have literally tumbled into circumstances beyond their ken. Eventually escape is possible, but until then, they must not only survive but also forge alliances with and possibly against an array of potential allies and enemies. Only together will they be able to stave of the threat and get out . . .

Belly of the Beast goes into some depth to explain both the motives and possible courses of action for each of the NPCs. Although this is very helpful in keeping track of the seven major NPCs and their subordinates, as well as giving a voice to each, is no easy undertaking for the DM. Perhaps a DM's assistant might be needed here. This is the main weakness of *In The Belly Of The Beast*.

The other problem with *Belly of the Beast* is as much an advantage as it is a disadvantage. The adventure is deemed to take place in a city of the DM's choice, with all of the necessary details and background being provided to run the

adventure, but little more. This leaves what information that is given on the adventure's major players as perhaps a little too generic. If the DM is to include it within their campaign, they are going to have to add greatly to this information themselves. Though not a problem to the experienced referee, the less experienced may be left wanting more detail, and the highly generic aspects of *Belly of the Beast* could be a disadvantage to them. Yet this does make the adventure very flexible, allowing the DM to choose not only the location, but possibly the fantasy RPG of their choice too. This could work just as well in *Warhammer Fantasy Role-Play* as it does in *d20*.

By placing the adventure in a single closed room environment (reminiscent of a classic convention live-action game), *Belly of the Beast* contains lots of opportunity for both roleplaying and interaction. In fact, this is the main focus of the adventure, though combat is not ignored, as force of arms will most definitely be required if the players are to escape. The author has done a nice job of achieving a good balance between the two.

On the downside, the long-term usefulness of this scenario could be better. yet this minor gripe aside, *In The Belly Of The Beast* is a challenging adventure for characters of this level. It is generic enough to slot into any city of the DM's choosing and contains several pieces of background that can be added to, and developed for, an existing campaign.

-- Matthew Pook (With thanks to Roj at Wayland's Forge)

The Legacy of Zorro Introductory Adventure Game

Published by [Gold Rush Games](#)



Written by Mark Arsenault

Fuzion rules by David Ackerman, Ray Greer, Bruce Harlick, George MacDonald, Steve Peterson, Mike Pondsmith, and Benjamin Wright

32 pages, \$9.95

It seems that good introductory roleplaying games, suited for younger or inexperienced players, are becoming harder and harder to find. Gold Rush Games has answered this need before with their *Usagi Yojimbo RPG* and now they're doing it again with their *Legacy of Zorro Introductory Adventure Game*, based on the adventures of the swashbuckling masked hero in colonial California and due for release in June.

The game is a 32-page 8.5" x 11" book containing a simple set of rules, four sample characters, and an introductory adventure (complete with a two-page map). The first four pages provide an overview of roleplaying games and an introduction to the world of Zorro in early 19th century Spanish California. The players don't get to play Zorro (which player would get to play him, after all?). Instead, they play people chosen and trained by Zorro to aid in his fight against injustice.

Seven pages provide all of the basic rules of the game, using the "Instant Fuzion" game system (also used in *Usagi Yojimbo*) with a few interesting twists. The basic game system is Attribute + Skill + 3d6 vs. a difficulty number, with damage rolls handled by rolling a number of d6 and adding them (then subtracting the target's Defense). There are four main attributes: Mental, Physical, Action, and Movement. There are also Hits that determine how much damage characters can suffer, Defense for soaking damage, and two attributes players can use to influence their characters' luck: Faith and Pride. Faith represents belief in a higher power, and players can use Faith points to give characters a bonus on die rolls relating to merciful and helpful actions. Pride is a measure of self-confidence, and can be used to improve aggressive or selfish actions (that help the character rather than someone else). Both sorts of points can also be used to reduce the amount of damage a character suffers from an attack, allowing *Zorro* characters to pull off daring stunts and survive combat more easily.

Characters also receive "Z Points" for dramatic actions during play, which they can use to greatly improve die rolls for swashbuckling and daring-do. Interestingly, characters receive Z Points for dramatic critical failures as well as critical successes, simulating the situations where heroes manage to overcome sudden reversals of fortune. Characters can only save so many Z Points from game to game, encouraging players to spend them.

The game has a short selection of very broad skills like Athletics, Combat, and Reasoning, which improve the use of different attributes. It includes an automatic success rule (if a character's Attribute + Skill is greater than the difficulty number), critical successes, and critical failures. The game uses a basic version of Fuzion's fairly comprehensive combat system. The choice of swordfighting maneuvers is a bit limited but covers the important ones like blocking, disarming, and pinning an opponent's weapon.

The middle of the book contains four sample characters (with two-sided character sheets) complete with background, roleplaying tips, and a summary of available actions for easy reference. Each character also has a "special talent" that helps make it distinctive.

The remaining ten pages are taken up by the adventure "Rescue Zorro!" in which the Fox has been captured by the soldatos and the player characters must rescue him from prison. It's a simple introductory adventure, with plenty of advice for the GM and players, clearly intended for beginners (including things like a brief aside on what to do if the players decide to just slaughter their opponents, pointing out "that is not Zorro's way"). It helps set up the idea that the player characters are "helpers" Zorro has chosen in his fight for justice, and encourages them to strike out on their own a bit at the end of the adventure.

The only thing the game is really lacking is a way of creating new characters, which will be included (along with expanded rules and much more setting information) in the forthcoming *World of Zorro Adventure Game and Resource Book*, due out in the Fall (and priced at \$24.95). Otherwise the *Intro Game* contains all the rules for a swashbuckling adventure. It's a great and inexpensive way to introduce new players to the roleplaying hobby with a character that's familiar to most people (especially since the recent release of the *Mask of Zorro* film, with a sequel already in the works). If you're interested in swashbuckling heroic adventure or looking for a good, simple, "entry level" RPG, I recommend giving the *Legacy of Zorro* game a try. You can find more information and support at Gold Rush Games' ZorroRPG.com website.

-- Steve Kenson

Murphy's Rules



by John Kovalic

Murphy's Rules



Murphy's Rules



Mermaids and Manatees

(*not* a d20 supplement)

Art by [ArtToday](#), colored by Ben Kimball

This is a picture of a mermaid.

Mermaid



This is a picture of a manatee.

Manatee



It's been argued that legends of mermaids began when sailors saw manatees at sea, and mistook these gentle sea cows to be beautiful women with the tails of fish.

These were lonely, lonely sailors.

Anyway, the point (and yes, there *is* a point) is that our eyes can lie.

But how do you represent this in gaming . . . without having the players and GM come to blows?

Consider this. The adventurers are wandering through the fantasy city of D'Troit. They follow the captain of the guard through the Nagihcim Dungeon. Midway through the Dungeon the captain turns into a rampaging slugmonster, and proceeds to attack the party.

"But wait!" one player says. "I'm a *member* of the city guard! Why didn't I notice that the guard was an impostor?"

"Well," says the GM, "because I rolled your perception in private. You failed."

"But we've spent 18 hours with him! I've known the captain for years before this! Surely I'd know if he were an impostor!"

"Umm... you failed a lot of rolls."

And then the players vote the GM off the island.

On the other hand, consider the alternative. "Okay; you're about to enter the dungeon. The person who looks like the captain of the guard follows up the rear."

"Whoa! *Looks like???* Um . . . do I notice anything odd about the captain of the guard? Does he use the same hand as I remember? I sniff him; does he smell right?" And so on.

Most of the best adventures come about where things aren't what they seem: the hidden trap, the impostor, the final clue. It's a fine art to obfuscate these bits, and keep them surprising while still fair to the players, and it's an art that I'm still not sure I have right as a GM. But I've come up with some tips, which hopefully may help someone out there.

- *A glimpse is uncertain.* Manatees can most easily be mistaken for mermaids when they're only seen for a moment, from afar. If the manatee hovers an inch from the boat, gnawing on seaweed and looking weird, even the most grog-filled pirate would be hard pressed to mistake it for a mermaid. So in our captain of the guard example, if the Captain runs up to the heroes, breathlessly hands them a note, and says, "Deliver this to the Prince! Quickly . . . I have to go alert the others!" before running off, there's only the briefest of moments that the heroes *might* notice something's amiss.
- *Knowledge is incremental.* In the real world, most mysteries don't hinge on the proverbial smoking gun; instead they're usually the result of tiny scraps put together. It's the same in most day-to-day mysteries. If you think your mate is having an affair, it's more often because of pieces taken together that indicate a whole: too many phone calls that hang up without speaking, too many unexplained charges on the credit card, lipstick on his collar that isn't his shade (ba-dum bum). This works well in gaming; each piece should be easily explained away taken separately, but taken together it should all make sense. In our captain of the guard example, the guard may not be riding his trademark horse ("Oh, it's sick currently," he explains). He may ride off without saluting like he normally does (he *must* be in a hurry . . .right?). He may use a different fighting stance, and strike more fiercely or softly than he normally does. And so on.
- *Not all of reality is a plot.* We all have secrets; just because someone is hiding something from you doesn't mean they're a shapeshifting brain-eater (or a mermaid). If you plan to make mysteries part of your games, it's strongly recommended that you include many mysterious non-threats. Thus the week before the captain of the guard may have been favoring his off-hand . . . because he injured it while sparring. He may be sneaking out at night . . . to partake of a clandestine interlude. And so on. If you have plenty of red herrings and non-events surrounding the characters, they won't feel the need to get paranoid and investigative whenever you make them roll for perception.
- *Some plots are obvious.* When structuring your plot, make sure you understand *why* you're making something a mystery, and seeking to deceive the characters' perceptions. Sometimes the story can be made more interesting if you automatically say that one or more characters knows something immediately. In our example above, envision this:

The Captain runs up to the heroes, breathlessly hands them a note, and says, "Deliver this to the Prince! Quickly . . . I have to go alert the others!" The GM pulls the player whose character is a member of the guard aside, and tells him, "You know, in your heart of hearts, that is *not* the captain. And you have only seconds to react before he gets away. You're also holding a note. What do you do?"

- *People see things based on their interests and worldviews.* I'll touch on this later (perhaps next week), but for now I'll point out that we tend to see the world based on our interests and passions. Thus a martial master may notice the guard runs as if he were slightly out of shape. The priest may notice that the Captain doesn't have a religious symbol prominent on his belongings like most soldiers, the scholarly wizard may notice the penmanship on the note, and so on. By making each PC have a unique sphere of knowledge you can ensure that each player feels special, and can make the clues you deliver that much smaller.

We only know the world through our senses; our senses lie to us. In roleplaying, it is the GM who is our senses . . . and thus it is the GM who lies to us. But ideally, if he plays fair (perhaps by using these ideas), and everyone has fun, the players are about as likely to be angry with the GM as they are to curse their eyes when they see mermaids instead of manatees.

* * *

Kenneth Hite is too darn busy this week with various secret projects that we can't comment on (though I *will* note that the pilots who were in China *are* safely home in the U.S., and they're still working on getting the spy plane back . . .). As such Suppressed Transmission is taking the week off. But it should be back next week . . . unless *fnord* happens.

-- Steven Marsh

* * *

Last week's answer: Vampire Diary: The Embrace, pp. 4-5.

(Three stars) "Any character who says the magic words 'Jim, I can't push her any faster than that' or 'Damn it, Jim, I'm a doctor (or magician)' gets 5,000 xp for being a Star Trek fan."



by Volker Bach

Editor's note: This piece is a companion (of sorts) to last month's article "[The Western Way of War.](#)" Although it's not necessary to read that article to enjoy this one, they do complement each other. (And it's not like we're making you hunt down a back issue or anything . . .)

While most roleplaying games tend to depict western fighting styles before the Renaissance as very simple, not to say primitive, few things could be further from the truth. Medieval armsmasters may not have measured up to Shao Lin monks in their legendary feats, but they trained their pupils in sophisticated, complex styles tailored to the exploit strengths of the weapon and the individual. Not being literary types, they rarely left a lasting record until about 1400. Fighting techniques before that time are difficult to reconstruct, and even afterwards it is hard to piece the scraps of evidence together, but there is enough material to paint a fairly complete picture of the most widespread styles. They may lack the elegance of Renaissance fencing and the mystique of eastern teachings, but they certainly did not want for effectiveness or sophistication. Anyone playing in a historical medieval or fantasy setting will surely appreciate them.

Compared to the Asian styles, European fighting techniques were depressingly unmystical and appallingly dirty. Christian knights may have held some religious views about the esoteric significance of their weapons and discipline and some armsmasters taught the use of charms and folk magic along with their more mundane styles, but these were exceptions. Most fighting men had an earthy, practical appreciation of their techniques. Happily unencumbered by notions of cosmic harmony, stylishness or fair play, they practiced styles unsurpassed in their refined brutality. Not just street thugs but soldiers, students, knights and even the instructors of princes and noblemen taught and readily used these moves. The opponent was kneed in the groin, punched in the face, tripped, kicked, strangled and elbowed, had his eyes poked, his nose twisted, ears torn, fingers broken, and sand (if not powdered quicklime!) thrown in his face. Cloaks, rocks, bottles . . . anything remotely suited to the purpose was pressed into service as a weapon. The overriding idea was brutally direct: to maim and kill with a minimum of fuss and danger for oneself. Even in sporting contests and tournaments lethal accidents were not unknown, and anyone complaining about such trifling things as a broken wrist or a lost tooth was branded a sissy.

The practice of (mostly armed) martial arts was fairly widespread in medieval Europe. Most people were permitted to own weapons of some kind, and many young men wanted to learn how to use them. Prowess at arms was a status symbol as well as a useful skill in a violent age. Thus, the aristocracy was bound by social expectation to learn the handling of arms and young commoners of the upper classes sought to imitate their betters, while peasants learned at least to defend themselves and many poor men spent their hard-earned money on lessons in the use of shortsword or knife. Even monks and priests indulged in wrestling matches and sporting contests of swordplay. Undoubtedly most of these people had no more than basic competence with their weapons, but many pursued this path farther, and some devoted their life to the mastery of arms.

Except for noblemen, the career of a professional fighting man was hardly attractive. Commoner armsmasters were socially grouped with entertainers, pimps, and barber surgeons. Mercenary soldiers were reviled almost universally, and professional champions making a precarious living by standing in for people in trials-by-combat had few chances to enter a bourgeois existence. Teachers of the martial arts could become wealthy, but hardly ever respectable. Most students acquired their martial skills as a hobby, or out of vital necessity, not in the hope of making a living with them.

Aside from this, there was always a spectator sport element to the martial arts. The knightly classes competed in tournaments, much to the delight of large numbers of spectators. Trial by combat, both for nobles and commoners, was not only an extant judicial process but also a surefire crowd pleaser. Noblemen dueled, not, as became the standard later, surreptitiously, but openly and with prior announcement, before anyone who cared to watch. Armsmasters and their students occasionally gave show fights for a paying audience, and the graduation ceremonies and masters' exams of these schools were public events with great attendance. One couldn't call it bloodsport, strictly speaking, but as in many violent sports today people came expecting to see blood spilled.

The teaching of martial skills was strictly a commercial affairs. The best armsmasters were retained by noblemen to teach their children and train their knights and followers. Others set up private schools in cities, teaching their art to paying students. In some countries they developed a regular guild structure, complete with royal patents and journeyman's and master's examinations, in the course of the 14th century. Their fees ranged from stiff to exorbitant, but the cachet of having studied under, and obtained a certificate from, one of the great names made it seem worthwhile to many. For a mercenary soldier, it might even be a career move -- certified halberdiers or swordsmen commanded higher pay and often were promoted to elite units. The lowest kind of teachers were itinerant, moving from place to place in search of business and holding classes in bathhouses, brothels or backyards. Their credentials were often dubious, but they were cheaper than the regular schools and more than happy to teach people without enquiring too much into their background or intentions. Informally, anyone with any skill in fighting happily passed it on. Archery, for example, was a popular sport in England; wrestling and crossbow shooting were favored in Germany.

Maneuvers

Armed Grapple (Hard)

*Defaults to DX-3, Wrestling-3 or Judo-3
Cannot exceed prerequisite skill level*

It is possible, if difficult, to execute grapples and throws with one's hands full. Penalties vary; a Close Combat weapon (Reach C), buckler or similarly small item will put a character at -2, a sword-sized (Reach 1) weapon or other medium-sized object will already give -4, and a weapon with a Reach greater than 2 (or other large item) will result in a -6 penalty. The Armed Grapple maneuver allows a character to buy off up to -3 of these penalties. As with Hit Location, it may not be used to increase success chances beyond what the unmodified chance would be. A character skilled in the Armed Grapple Maneuver may also use a Judo Parry at -2, while holding a close combat weapon or similarly small object. This penalty can not be bought off. Once a grapple is established, a held weapon (not a buckler) may be used for extra leverage, giving the wielder +2 to all Contests to hold on. Grappling while armed was an important part of many European combat styles.

Face Attacks

(p. MA48)

There is no reason (other than style) why this Maneuver should not default to Karate. In the Combat Wrestling style it is used with that Skill, in keeping with the refined savagery of medieval fighting styles.

*Hook (Hard) Defaults to Polearm-2, Axe/Mace-2, Two-Handed Sword-2 or
Two-Handed Axe/Mace-2
Prerequisite: Polearm, Axe/Mace, Two-Handed Axe/Mace or
Two-Handed Sword
Cannot exceed prerequisite skill level*

This attack can be used with every weapon that has a hook or hooked beak (halberds, picks, bearded axes, bills, daggeraxes, poleaxes and various exotic polearms fall into this category). A specialized form of the Maneuver is also

used with the quillons of two-handed swords gripped by the *ricasso*. The attacker uses the hook to catch the target's limb, weapon or shield (the attack must be specifically targeted to one of these. Hit Location penalties apply). A Hook attempt can be dodged, parried or blocked. However, since the Hook does not depend on getting through armor, the PD of all armor is reduced by 2 for purposes of defending against this attack. After a successful Hook, the attacker pulls his weapon to put the target off balance. This pull happens on the same turn, immediately after the attack. If the weapon's hook is sharp this may cause some cutting damage in the process (GM's call. The amount should not exceed thr-1 even for the largest weapons). Armor protects fully. Other effects depend on what is hooked. If a weapon is caught, the attacker may attempt to disarm the target. Roll a Quick Contest between the attacker's Hook and the defender's Weapon Skill or Retain Weapon Maneuver. If the attacker wins, the target is disarmed. If the defender wins he retains his weapon, but an unbalanced weapon is unready the following turn. Swords, knives and similar weapons without protrusions to catch onto can not be hooked. If a shield is hooked the attacker can pull it aside. Roll a Quick Contest between the attacker's Hook and the defender's Shield Skill. If the attacker wins, the shield becomes unready. The defender is prevented from blocking and loses the benefit of its PD until he can re-ready it. If a limb or the neck is hooked, the attacker may pull the defender off balance. Roll a Contest of ST between the attacker and defender (the attacker is at -1 if he uses one hand only, +1 for a weapon with Reach 2, +2 for one with Reach 3. A mounted defender may substitute his Riding Skill for ST). If the weapon does damage to an unprotected location, the defender needs to make a Will Roll to force himself to resist the pull (+2 for Combat Reflexes, +4 for High Pain Threshold). If the attacker wins the Contest of ST, the defender is pulled off balance and can not use any attacks or Active Defenses the following round. If he wins by more than 2, the defender falls down. If the defender wins he keeps his balance and can act normally.

Improved Parry

(p. SW20)

This Maneuver should also apply to unarmored shortsword, broadsword, and longsword forms developed in medieval Europe. The wielder may not have more than Light Encumbrance and must have room to move to benefit from the Improved Parry with any of these weapons.

The Styles

The styles as laid out here are reconstructed from contemporary manuscripts and pictures, filled out with some educated guesswork. Most of the sources depict masters fighting, so they represent very advanced fighting techniques, and it is perfectly defensible to allow PCs to study stripped-down versions of any style. European armsmasters mostly did not view their styles holistically, and were happy to teach techniques separately. Final choice in this matter lies with the GM.

COMBAT WRESTLING

16/17 POINTS

While open-hand forms were not usually very highly regarded in Europe, armsmasters developed an effective style of unarmed combat. Combat wrestling had no pretensions to elegance or nicety (the farthest the masters would go in this direction was to label certain moves "not convivial", i.e. not to be used in friendly bouts). Despite the name "wrestling," it included blows and kicks as well as holds and throws. The techniques were quite sophisticated, justifying the Judo and Karate Skill, but unlike many "soft" Eastern techniques the emphasis was never on allowing weaker fighters to turn the opponent's strength against him. Many combat wrestling moves required great strength to use, and the idea of a wizened old master effortlessly defeating a young student would have seemed preposterous to European teachers.

Combat wrestling was a fast and furious style relying mostly on infighting, though it also included some attacks used at arm's length. Fighters would circle each other, exchanging blows and looking for an opportunity to apply a hold or effect a takedown. Striking techniques were sophisticated (using the expanded Hit Location rules on p. CII53 is suggested), but kicks did not see much use. Throws designed to drop the opponent in some dangerous manner, preferably on the head, were a major feature. (A Judo Throw to drop the opponent on his head is at -6. To bring down

this penalty, the Hit Location (Judo) Maneuver is used. GMs may want to expand on the creative uses of "drop locations.") Most fights ended in close combat as one opponent crippled or knocked out the other.

Primary Skills: Judo; Karate

Secondary Skills: Body Language

Optional Skills: Knife

Maneuvers: Arm Lock; Choke Hold; Disarming (Judo); Elbow Strike; Eye Gouging; Face Attacks; Feint (Karate); Finger Lock; Ground Fighting (Judo); Head Butt; Head Lock; Hit Location (Judo); Hit Location (Karate); Neck Snap

Cinematic Skills and Maneuvers: Pressure Points (this models the reputed ability of master wrestlers to cripple limbs with excruciatingly painful blows).

DAGGER FIGHTING

14/- POINTS

Large, often double-edged knives with a strong thrusting point were the most common weapon of self-defense carried in Europe's cities. Consequently, martial arts teachers considered using them, and defending against them, a very important ability. Some such knives could be very long (up to 18" in length), almost shortswords. Soldiers sometimes carried these as secondary weapons.

New Weapon: Knife

Name	Type	Damage	Reach	Cost	Weight	MinST	Notes
Long Knife	imp cut	thr sw-2	C,1 1	\$120	1.5 lbs	6	-1 to Parry

Dagger fighting (sometimes also called dagger-wrestling, pointing to the strong role grapples and throws played in it) always was a morally dubious technique. It was taught regularly, but many good citizens questioned the motives of teacher and student alike as it would be of most use to footpads, burglars, and young hotheads looking for trouble. It is unlikely that this refined art was ever common among the underclass, but in a campaign that takes liberties with the truth it would be ideal for thieves. It was certainly popular among university students, apprentices, and wealthy young men with nothing better to do.

Dagger fighting was a fast and furious style alternating between intervals of circling each other at a distance and quick bouts of close stabbing, grappling, shoving, and punching. Students were taught to fight both with one and two blades, keeping the opponent at a distance with quick jabs until the saw an opening in his defense, then closing in for the kill. Great attention was paid to disarming moves, but it is likely that both sides would come out of such a fight badly cut at best.

Primary Skills: Brawling; Judo; Knife

Secondary Skills: Fast-Draw (Knife)

Optional Skills: Knife Throwing

Maneuvers: Arm Lock; Armed Grapple; Close Combat (Knife); Disarming (Judo); Eye Gouging; Face Attacks; Feint (Knife); Finger Lock; Knee Strike; Off-Hand Weapon Training (Knife); Retain Weapon (Knife)

Cinematic Skills and Maneuvers: None are recorded. Some tales of German masters would justify allowing them Toughness and/or Extra Hit Points.

Sword Forms

SHORTSWORD FIGHTING

16/24 POINTS

The shortsword was an unpopular weapon for much of the middle ages, but around 1250 blades around 2' in length appeared in the hands of foot soldiers. The high point of this development came in the late 15th and early 16th centuries in Germany, where such weapons were the normal sidearm of the *Landsknechte*. Many commoners throughout Europe used the handier, lighter and cheaper shortswords, and in some areas they were legally restricted to them, broadswords being reserved for the nobility. Shortswords, like daggers, could be worn with street clothes even in the city and used in tight corners.

Shortsword fighting was used by unarmored or lightly armored combatants relying on deft footwork and quick parries for their protection. Some used two swords, one to defend and the other to attack. The razor-sharp swords were primarily designed for cuts, though most had a stabbing point, and fighters were trained to defend themselves in close combat with hand parries, grapples, kicks and blows with the pommel.

Primary Skills: Brawling; Judo; Shortsword

Secondary Skills: Fast-Draw (Shortsword)

Optional Skills: Knife or Main-Gauche

Maneuvers: Arm Lock; Armed Grapple; Close Combat (Shortsword); Close Combat (Pummeling); Bind; Disarming (Judo); Eye Gouging; Feint (Shortsword); Ground Fighting (Shortsword); Hit Location (Shortsword); Improved Parry (Shortsword); Lunge (cut) (Shortsword); Off-Hand Weapon Training (Shortsword)

Cinematic Maneuvers: Dual Weapon Attack (Shortsword); Enhanced Parry; Fighting While Seated (Shortsword)

SWORD-AND-BUCKLER PLAY

14/20 POINTS

Fighting with the broadsword and buckler was a common method of self-defense among the nobility and bourgeois classes of Europe from at least 1250 onwards. It may well be much older than this as Germanic and Viking warriors were known to use their iron shield bosses in combat like bucklers after their light wooden shields disintegrated. Around the middle of the 13th century, metal bucklers are seen in illustrations on the swordbelts of unarmored knights and common travelers. This method of fighting appears to have been popular with the urban upper classes, students and clerics. Footsoldiers, especially archers, crossbowmen and handgunners, often studied it as a form of self-defense to use when their formations were broken. In a fantasy setting it is the natural choice for elves.

Sword-and-buckler fighting relied strongly on mobility and speed. The fighter faced his opponent squarely, keeping both sword and buckler pointing forward and keeping him at arm's length. Both cut and thrust attacks were used, as were shield bashes (thrust crushing damage, or swing crushing when swung, in which case the buckler cannot be used to Block that round. It is possible to sharpen the rim of a metal buckler -- convert swing damage to cut.) and quite sophisticated fencing moves. Wrestling grapples, trips, throws and kicks to exploit an opportunity to step into close combat were also part and parcel of the style. Though there was a sport form intended for public display and friendly competition, this was mainly practiced as a serious form of self-defense.

Primary Skills: Brawling; Broadsword; Buckler; Wrestling

Secondary Skills: Knife

Optional Skills: Fast-Draw (Broadsword)

Maneuvers: Arm Lock; Armed Grapple; Bind; Counterattack (Broadsword); Disarming (Broadsword); Feint (Broadsword); Kicking; Lunge [cut] (Broadsword); Lunge [thrust] (Broadsword); Retain Weapon (Broadsword)

Cinematic Skills: No cinematic feats are recorded of sword-and-buckler fighters.

Cinematic Maneuvers: Enhanced Block

SWORD-AND-SHIELD FIGHTING

8/- POINTS

In its prime in the early Middle Ages, the use of sword and shield in combat remained a popular style with soldiers until well into the Renaissance. It is likely that this style retained many elements of much earlier fighting methods practiced as far back as the Dark Ages. Unlike bucklers, shields were clearly military weapons and were not normally carried by civilians. They were popular both in Southern Europe (Spanish troops included sword-and-shield-men well

into the 16th century) and in the Celtic areas of Britain. In a fantasy campaign, this style will be close to ubiquitous as nearly anyone carries sword and shield.

After 1350, the shield was mostly an infantry weapon. A number of forms were used, with the round targe or rondache (Medium Shield, PD3) being the favorite. Targes could be made out of hardened leather (4 lbs, as carried in Scotland), plain wood (6-8 lbs, in use throughout Europe) or metal-covered wood (12 lbs, favored in Italy and Spain after 1450). Some targes came equipped with sharp spikes (thr impaling damage on a shield bash).

Our evidence for the style is slimmer than for most others, but apparently it emphasized deft footwork, fast stabbing attacks and fighting at arm's length, though it also included some wrestling moves. Fighters held their shields at chest height, blocking incoming attacks actively. Parries were rarely used. Attacks were made at range, lunging and jabbing at vulnerable points, and fighters needed much space to circle each other and gain an advantageous position. The aggressive use of the shield was taught regularly, with bashes being executed with the boss (thr cr) and the rim (thr+1 cr). As a desperate measure, fighters also used their shields to swing at the enemy (sw+2 cr, but the shield becomes unready).

Primary Skills: Broadsword; Shield; Wrestling

Secondary Skills: Brawling; Knife

Optional Skills: Acrobatics

Maneuvers: Attack and Fly Out; Counterattack (Broadsword); Feint (Broadsword); Hit Location (Broadsword); Lunge [thrust] (Broadsword)

Cinematic Skills and Maneuvers: Enhanced Block or Dodge would be in character.

LONGSWORD FIGHTING

19/- POINTS

The two-handed longsword was a popular weapon in later medieval central Europe after about 1350 until it was eclipsed by rapier-type blades. It represented a hybrid between a broadsword and bastard sword with a relatively light 30"-45" blade tapering evenly from base to tip and a two-handed hilt with wide quillons. The blade had a *ricasso* (unsharpened part at the base) extending almost halfway up. Fighters could grip the weapon by the hilt and ricasso for the 'half-sword' defensive stance not unlike that adopted with the staff, or place both hands on the ricasso of an inverted sword to use the Hook Maneuver with the quillons or hit the opponent over the head with the pommel (At 'half-sword' stance, only thrusting attacks can be made. Changing from the regular grip to either stance or back requires a full action. Changing from 'half-sword' to inverted sword or back is a free action.). Shorter versions were worn on the belt by civilians, being no more unwieldy than later rapiers, while larger types, approaching the bastard sword in weight and reach, were carried on the saddlebow or blank in the hands of knights fighting in the lists. The style was also taught to the *Doppelsoeldner*, wielders of fearsome 6-foot greatswords, and though it is unlikely that any fancy footwork or deft maneuvering was possible while being encumbered with such a weapon, all men aspiring to the privileged status of greatswordman had to produce a diploma from a recognized armsmaster certifying that they had mastered the longsword. As fantasy settings go, this style is a favorite of paladins and knights in shining armor, but the historical style is a bit too 'dirty' to appeal to the stereotype. The hulking barbarian warrior, on the other hand, should be quite happy with it as written.

New Weapon: 2-Handed Sword

Name	Type	Damage	Reach	Cost	Weight	MinST	Notes
Longsword	cut imp	sw+1 thr+2	1,2 1,2	\$600	4 lbs	7	Only the last third of the blade is sharp

Longsword fighting was used armored as well as unarmored. The blade was intended mostly for stabbing, though its forward section was sharp enough to deliver cuts. Armored fighters used an up-close-and-personal style involving many wrestling moves and bashing and battering while unarmored fencers, unprotected from the secondary cuts likely

to be inflicted by swordblades in a scrimmage, preferred to keep their distance, circling and feinting until they saw an opening to step in. Nonetheless the armored and unprotected techniques were considered the same by contemporary teachers.

Primary Skills: Brawling; Judo; Knife; Two-Handed Sword

Secondary Skills: Broadsword

Optional Skills: Fast Draw (Knife)

Maneuvers: Arm Lock; Armed Grapple; Bind; Close Combat (Pummeling); Counterattack (2-Hd. Sword); Disarming (2-Hd. Sword); Disarming (Judo); Ground Fighting (Knife); Hit Location (2-Hd. Sword); Hook (2-Hd. Sword); Improved Parry (2-Hd. Sword); Kicking; Knee Strike; Lunge [thrust] (2-Hd. Sword); Retain Weapon (2-Hd. Sword)
Cinematic Skills and Maneuvers: Both Enhanced Dodge and Enhanced Parry fit the bill, but no truly cinematic feats are recorded of the masters of this weapon.

Optional Rule: The Longsword Fighting style uses the Improved Parry Maneuver that is canonically reserved for light, swift weapons. It is perfectly feasible with the common longsword types about 3 feet in length and 3 lbs in weight, but increasingly unlikely to work with the weapons normally used with the Two-Handed Sword Skill. Instead of forbidding it outright with the heavier blades, GMs could resort to the following rule: Improved Parry can be used with bastard swords and greatswords if the wielder's ST exceeds the MinST for these weapons (wielded two-handed) by 4 or more. Every point of ST below this limit will give a -1 penalty to Parry. Fighters gripping the sword by the hilt and ricasso in the 'half-sword' stance are considered to have +2 to effective ST for this purpose.

Polearm Forms

STAFF FIGHTING

11/18 POINTS

The staff, while essentially a poor man's weapon, was mastered by many formally trained fighters. Several armsmasters regarded the use of the staff as the foundation of all spear and polearm work and the techniques were similar enough to justify that view. Contrary to the common stereotype, the staff was not the weapon of the peace-loving or nonaggressive. Ruffians going about the highways carrying long staves with iron ferrules or points (thr+2 imp. Use the Spear Skill to stab effectively. Changing grips requires a full action) were the terror of the countryside in unsafe times. Historically, the staff was largely a plebeian weapon, and in a fantasy campaign it is best placed in the hands of stout peasant lads and merry outlaws. Elves may take to it, but will probably dislike the iron points.

Some staves were as long as 12', which forbade their use as a quarterstaff. These were wielded with the Spear Skill (as a regular quarterstaff can be -- increase swing damage by 1), sacrificing defensive ability (1/2 Parry instead of 2/3) for increased reach and damage.

New Weapon

New Weapon: Spear

Name	Type	Damage	Reach	Cost	Weight	MinST	Notes
Long Staff	cr	sw+3	1,2,3	\$20	6 lbs	9	
	cr	thr+1	2,3				

Staff fighting depended on keeping the opponent at a distance with the weapons held ready between the fighters. Long periods of circling, feinting and sparring alternated with furious attacks to vulnerable targets. Once come to grips the fighters grappled, kicked and pushed, trying to disarm the opponent and using their weapon for extra leverage in takedowns and holds.

Primary Skills: Brawling; Staff; Wrestling

Secondary Skills: Spear; Knife

Optional Skills: Parry Missile Weapons (Staff)

Cinematic Skills and Maneuvers: The staff had little mystique attached to it, and no miraculous abilities are recorded of its wielders. Enhanced Parry and Power Blow would be in character.

SPEAR FIGHTING

9/- POINTS

The boundaries between staff and spear fighting were fluid, but the armsmasters distinguished certain techniques suitable for the one or the other. While spears had been used in concert with shields for most of the middle ages, by the time the sources give us any clear idea of their use they were wielded two-handed with a defensive stance taken from the Staff technique. Historically, spears had become uncommon by the later Middle Ages, being carried mostly by huntsmen. Some royal guards used spear-style polearms like the partisan. Fantasy savages from the fringes of the civilized world should adapt well to this style.

Spear fighting, like staff fighting, was done at a distance with the opponents circling, jabbing and parrying before closing in with a killing attack. Failing that, fighters could go into close combat, mastering a sophisticated array of wrestling moves.

Primary Skills: Spear; Staff; Wrestling

Secondary Skills: Brawling; Knife

Optional Skills: Parry Missile Weapons (Staff); Spear Throwing

Maneuvers: Arm Lock; Back Strike (Spear); Lunge (Spear); Spinning Strike (Spear); Sweep (Spear); Tip Slash (Spear)

Cinematic Skills and Maneuvers: None of the near-miraculous feats that embellish the records of other weapons are recorded with the spear.

POLEARM FIGHTING

11/18 POINTS

While appearing clumsy and slow, the manifold variations on the polearm theme (bills, glaives, and halberds being the most common) were used by the armsmasters with consummate skill in a complex and brutal, aggressive style. Most polearms were relatively light (5-7 lbs) and between 6 and 8 feet in length, and could be used in a Staff grip for a defensive stance. They often had metal ferrules or even spikes attached to the butt to allow secondary attacks.

Polearm fighting was a varied style, using the strengths of the design in hand (a forest bill being used to trap an attacker's blade while the halberd's forte lay in its hook and long stabbing point). Fighters would circle each other, sparring for an opening before stepping in to attack. Parries were made with blade and haft alike, and some masters taught refined counterattacking techniques. Hooks on the blades could be used to disarm, trip or unsaddle the opponent. Wide swings were discouraged in favor of stabbing attacks, though they were often used to dispatch fallen or disarmed foes.

Primary Skills: Brawling; Polearm; Staff

Secondary Skills: Knife; Wrestling

Optional Skills: Parry Missile Weapon (Staff)

Maneuvers: Counterattack (Polearm); Disarming (Polearm); Feint (Polearm); Hook (Polearm); Kicking; Knee Strike; Spinning Strike (Polearm); Sweep (Polearm)

Cinematic Skills and Maneuvers: None are expressly related in the sources but both Power Blow and Enhanced Parry would be in character.

POLEAXE FIGHTING

10/- POINTS

For a brief period in the 14th and 15th centuries, the poleaxe (or warhammer) gained popularity as a knightly weapon, being used in battle and in duels. Poleaxe fighting was a sophisticated style that remained popular as a sport form (with wooden axeheads) well into the Renaissance period. It probably has roots going very far back in time, perhaps as far as the great Danish axes of the Viking period. By the time the manuals began describing it, poleaxe fighting was a chivalrous style popular with the nobility and those who liked to ape their betters. Unlike a sword or dagger, a poleaxe could not be carried with street clothes and the whole style was geared to fighting in heavy armor. In a Fantasy campaign this one is the natural choice for dwarves.

Poleaxes were gripped two-handed like a quarterstaff, with the hands spaced far apart and the shaft held diagonally across the body. The emphasis was on close-in fighting, parries and jabs rather than wide swings that use the weapon's full power but expose the wielder. Hooking the axe's beak, blade or spike behind the opponent's weapon, leg or neck was another trademark technique. Some poleaxes were fitted with a concealed hollow space in the axehead to hold an irritant "blinding powder" (treat as Tear Gas, p. B132) that was spilled in the opponent's face (roll vs. Polearm-4 to release it, Active Defenses do not protect. However, every time the axe is used with a swinging attack there is a 2-in-6 chance of the powder being spilled accidentally, and any critical failure can spill it on the user.). The method was unfair, but effective.

Primary Skills: Polearm; Wrestling

Secondary Skills: Brawling

Optional Skills: Knife

Maneuvers: Arm Lock; Disarming (Polearm); Hit Location (Polearm); Hook (Polearm); Knee Strike; Retain Weapon (Polearm); Spinning Strike (Polearm); Sweep (Polearm)

Cinematic Skills and Maneuvers: None are recorded.

Dork Tower!



Dork Tower!



Pyramid Pick

The Witchfire Trilogy, Book One: The Longest Night (for d20)

Published by [Privateer Press](#)



Written by Matt Staroscik

Art by Brian Snoddy and Matt Wilson

64 pages; \$9.95

Since the release of *Dungeons & Dragons Third Edition* in August 2000, many companies have taken advantage of the Open Gaming Licence to release their own adventures for the game. A wide range are available, most of which are fairly standard flavored *D&D*. Some companies have gone further; Necromancer Games, for example, has looked back to the first edition *AD&D* for their inspiration, while Green Ronin mixed pirates with the Cthulhu Mythos in their *City of Freeport* setting. Now these companies have been joined by another.

The Longest Night is Book One of the *Witchfire Trilogy*, the first release from Privateer Press. This book offers a new campaign background in the form of the Iron Kingdoms, as well as a long scenario using this setting. The Iron Kingdoms is a world that combines technology and magic in the form of steam power, guns, and lumbering robots known as Steamjacks. These are powered by magical means as much as they are by technological. For example, Steamjacks are magically created but require coal to run, and guns do not use gunpowder as a propellant, but silk pouches of magical blasting powder that need to be individually created for each weapon. Such technology is uncommon, but serves to give the setting of the Iron Kingdoms a darker and slightly grimmer feel than the normal *D&D*, though still with the fantastical elements of that genre.

This dark tone is carried over into the look of the book. Matt Wilson's cover is ominously threatening, though as much as I like it, it does give away an important plot point! Brian Snoddy and Matt Wilson illustrate the inside of *The Longest Night* and their art compliments the oppressive feel of Matt Staroscik's writing, although it does have a slightly cartoon-like quality. Fans of Brian Snoddy's work on the *Friedey's Restaurant* games from Cheapass Games will be pleased to see that he gets to draw a zombie or two! The layout of the book isn't ornate, with useful information set aside in grey boxes, though it does have a couple of minor problems; there is an occasional spelling error, and the maps could be a little lighter, although they can still be read without any difficulty.

(SPOILER ALERT!)

The adventure is set in and around the town of Corvis, known as the City Of Ghosts, in the small Kingdom of Cygnar. The party travels to Corvis whilst guarding a caravan along the muddy trails through the swamp and forest surrounding the town. Once there, they are asked by a priest to investigate a recent spate of grave robberies in around Corviss.

After investigating each robbery, the characters discover that the disappearances are somehow linked to a witch trial that took place a decade earlier, and the priest suggests that the tomb of the witches should be their next port of call. This is the first of several trips that the party will make deep into the swamps around Corvis. Combined with an exploration of the warrens beneath the town, they can learn not only who is behind the robberies, but why they are doing it and the fact that they are assembling an army of undead to strike at Corviss on the Longest Night, a masked celebration for all of the townspeople held each year on the night of the lunar eclipse. This ends in a rousing climax

between the adventure's major protagonists, which is nicely handled considering the experience levels of those involved.

(END SPOILER ALERT)

Although this adventure is designed for three to four characters of first and second levels, it is perhaps a little too tough for so few characters. This might be a particular problem if the players are inexperienced. Otherwise this is a complex adventure, which has been given room to breathe in the 64-page format. There is opportunity aplenty for both role-playing and combat, although possibilities for material reward are rather slight. Magical items in particular are few in number, but they are actually woven into the setting. By giving each item a history and background, the author helps bring the setting of the Iron Kingdom further to life, even if only a little. One major oversight is the lack of suggested rewards for the actions undertaken by the players during the course of play, but this is my only serious complaint.

For many who read this book, it will be a disappointment to them that there is little detail given about the Steamjacks of the Iron Kingdoms. Enough information is provided to cover their appearance during the adventure, but the actual game statistics are not present. This has been rectified with the information being available through a link on the Privateer Press web site, but hopefully this information will appear in the next book in the Witchfire Trilogy.

In this, their first release, Privateer Press have done a great job of laying the groundwork for the Iron Kingdoms as a campaign setting. They provide enough information to get a feel for the town and area surrounding Corvis as well as giving a long adventure that is both interesting and challenging. With the addition of steam-powered technology, the Iron Kingdoms is not steampunk, but rather a steampunk-esque setting. Were it not for these aspects of the background, it would draw strong comparisons with the grim Old World setting of *Warhammer Fantasy Role-Play*. (Referees of that game may not want to run *The Longest Night* because of the steamjacks, but it is certainly worth them taking a look at this book.)

The Longest Night is the first part of what looks to be an excellent trilogy of adventures. Not only is the setting interesting and just that ever so slightly different from other D&D3e books, it also comes at an attractive price. Privateer press is to be applauded for the quality of their first release and let us hope that the next is equally as good.

-- *Matthew Pook*

The Waste Land Is A Terrible Thing To Waste

*"Ganga was sunken, and the limp leaves
Waited for rain, while the black clouds
Gathered far distant, over Himavant.
The jungle crouched, humped in silence.
Then spoke the thunder."*

-- T.S. Eliot, *The Waste Land*, 395-399

April is the cruelest month. Or so I've heard, anyway. I've also heard you should fear death by water, and that I should consider Phlebas, and that someone will show me fear in a handful of dust. And, at my back from time to time I hear the sound of horns and motors. I've heard it all (especially the horns and motors at my back) from the same place that you likely have, from T.S. (Thomas Stearns) Eliot's absolutely epochal poem *The Waste Land*.

For those who plan on using this column as more than a shadow under a red rock, I'd recommend biffing off and reading it [here](#), complete with Eliot's original footnotes. Yes, you read that right; the poem is so dense with allusion and metaphor and reference and meaning that the poet himself had to footnote it so that people would get it. (He later unhelpfully mentioned that the notes were a "remarkable exposition of bogus scholarship," and more popular than the poem itself -- whatever else you say about him, ol' Tom had a sense of humor.) Which makes *The Waste Land* kind of an ur-Suppressed Transmission, the city over the mountains cracked and reformed and burst in the violet air, with nothing but the stony rubbish of modern literature all around it. Reason enough, then, for this withered stump of a column.

*"My nerves are bad to-night. Yes, bad. Stay with me.
'Speak to me. Why do you never speak? Speak.
'What are you thinking of? What thinking? What?
'I never know what you are thinking. Think.'"*

-- T.S. Eliot, *The Waste Land*, 111-114

Eliot wrote *The Waste Land* in the winter of 1921-1922 as a lament for the desolation of Western civilization following World War One, although some of its passages date back to Eliot's arrival in England in 1914. Eliot wanted to strip out the meaningless connectives from the poem, creating a kind of mosaic or impression based on juxtaposed images (rather like a series of Tarot cards, actually) of startling clarity -- emotionally, if not intellectually. He succeeded brilliantly. However, this left him with a serious problem; how to structure the poem itself -- how, in a work now free of narrative, to introduce a narrative spine.

*"What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow
Out of this stony rubbish? Son of man,
You cannot say, or guess, for you know only
A heap of broken images, where the sun beats."*

-- T.S. Eliot, *The Waste Land*, 19-22

Relatively late in the poem's composition, as far as we can tell, Eliot decided to use the myth of the Grail and the Fisher King as his spine. (His experience reading Joyce's *Ulysses* in manuscript certainly inspired him to use mythology thusly, although Joyce didn't appreciate it.) In his notes, Eliot says that "Not only the title, but the plan and a good deal of the incidental symbolism of the poem were suggested by Miss Jessie L. Weston's book on the Grail legend: *From Ritual to Romance*," which appeared in 1920. Both Weston and Eliot also drew heavily on our old buddy J.G. Frazer's *Golden Bough*, especially "certain references to vegetation spirits" -- specifically, the Dying God Attis/Adonis/Osiris and his connection to the maimed (dead) and healed (reborn) Fisher King. Eliot also openly credits Dante, the Bible, Buddhist scriptures, the Upanishads, Jacobean playwrights, and classical myth taken straight.

*"Madame 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*, 43-46

But what pops to us gamer types, of course, is that business with the Tarot and the Holy Grail. As early as the first book publication of *The Waste Land*, Eliot begins to back away from that precipice; his note to line 46 says that he is "not familiar with the exact constitution of the Tarot pack of cards, from which I have obviously departed to suit my own convenience." Not satisfied to leave matters there, in 1956 he tried to back off the whole theme, saying: "It was just, no doubt, that I should pay my tribute to the work of Miss Jessie Weston. But I regret having sent so many inquirers off on a wild goose chase after Tarot cards and the Holy Grail." To quote almost the only poet more quoteable and Suppressible than Eliot, the lady doth protest too much, methinks. In *The Birth of Modernism: Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot, W.B. Yeats, and the Occult*, critic Leon Surette argues that Eliot, Pound, and Yeats were all associated in some fashion with the Occult Revival of the 1890s through the 1920s -- Yeats, obviously through the Golden Dawn, and Pound (who would later wage a bitter, maniacal literary war against global banking conspiracies) through Yeats. Pound, of course, edited *The Waste Land*, and Eliot dedicated the poem to him. Eliot was very familiar with Indian mysticism, later mentioning (as a cover?) that at the time he wrote the work, he had considered conversion to Buddhism. (Defection to Shangri-La?) Jessie Weston implied that the Grail was a Gnostic initiation cult, and that she gained her insights through friends' access to secret traditions. She may, hints Surette, have been a Theosophist, which paints an interesting picture of the eldritch Madame Blavatsky as Eliot's Madame Sosostriis, and the poem as initiatory ritual liturgy.

*"(Come in under the shadow of this red rock),
And I will show you something different from either
Your shadow at morning striding behind you
Or your shadow at evening rising to meet you;
I will show you fear in a handful of dust."*

-- T.S. Eliot, *The Waste Land*, 26-30

So now that we have a comfortably conspiratorial hook on which to hang the poem, how do you use it in a game? Any way you want to, of course. Since Eliot ties so much to the poem, you can piggyback on his allusions without too much sweat; snag a copy of B.C. Southam's *A Guide to the Selected Poems of T.S. Eliot* and go crack some books. Or, since Eliot has so many hooks and threads, you can add your own -- although Eliot seems ignorant of kabbalah, only a true spoilsport would insist that there's no meaning in the poem's 433 lines, 433 being a prime number between 432 ("world") and 434 ("door"). Perhaps a **GURPS Cliffhangers** team of two-fisted literary critics can hear of a dangerous poem opening incantatory doors to the Waste Land, or some modern (or Modernist) game can involve stumbling on the Gnostic Banking Conspiracy (the Gnosis of Zurich?) that Pound tried to emasculate by editing Eliot's invocatory work.

Even easier, you can simply sprinkle your game with Eliot quotes for creepy purposes. Why kill yourself coming up with disturbing phraseology when the greatest poet of the last century already has? "Fear death by water" is the most famous, probably, but "Tell her I bring the horoscope myself: One must be so careful these days," to pick a line (lines 58 and 59, specifically) virtually at random, makes a horripilating thing for a strange voice to rasp on the phone at midnight. (Why was the voice raspy? "Madame Sosostriis had a bad cold," I'd guess) The next stage is to borrow Eliot's imagery for creepy purposes, especially if your game already ties to the Grail, Gnosticism, human sacrifice, King Arthur, Christ, desolation, or the Tarot. Put a hyacinth girl, or a drowned Phoenician sailor, or a sprouting corpse, or "towers upside down in air" or "voices singing out of empty cisterns and exhausted wells" into your game and see if I'm not right. For some concrete examples, check out how Tim Powers did it in his modern fantasy novel *Last Call*, or Martin Rowson did in his surreal P.I. noir comic *The Waste Land*. Eliot also makes a fine example of parallelism and bisociation, especially of including the mundane ("Hurry up please it's time") alongside the sublime ("Shantih. Shantih. Shantih.") -- an important element in horror, urban fantasy, and conspiracy gaming.

*"April is the cruellest month, breeding
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
Memory and desire, stirring
Dull roots with spring rain."*

*Winter kept us warm, covering
Earth in forgetful snow, feeding
A little life with dried tubers."*
-- T.S. Eliot, *The Waste Land*, 1-7

As a final example, I'll limn a loosely-scripted *GURPS Bunnies and Burrows Waste Land* campaign. It's sketchy, but surprisingly complete given that all I did was reread Eliot while looking for rabbits. (Maybe it's the Easter candy talking, but go ahead and imagine a rabbit declaiming the seven lines above -- I dare you.) In the first act ("The Burial of the Dead"), we discover that the Downs are dying, laid waste by the hubris of some King Rabbit, who committed some grave crime, perhaps motivated by a young female rabbit named Hyacinth. Our heroes cast lots, and possibly meet the wizard-rabbit Stetson, who has some necromantic plan involving planted rabbit corpses and an army of undead conies. ("Oh keep the Dog far hence, that's friend to men/Or with his nails he'll dig it up again!") In the second act ("The Game of Chess"), they meet the (dead?) Queen, discover elements of insanity and infertility deep within the warren, and cross paths with the Rats, who can be the Nazgûl types in our story, and are abusing Stetson's foolish plan for their own ends. ("I think we are in rats' alley/Where the dead men lost their bones.") In the third act ("The Fire Sermon") the heroes uncover the Crime ("Musing upon the king my brother's wreck/And on the king my father's death before him") by Water, and hear (from Stetson, dying of Rattish treachery?) that the land must be purged by Fire, probably involving the "sound of horns and motors" and the "Isle of Dogs." The fourth act ("Death By Water") is very short, wherein the heroes finally meet the dead King (the victim of the death by water). The fifth act ("What the Thunder Said") features a trip along "rock and no water and the sandy road" where a mysterious "third figure" aids them. They somehow (Compassion? Alms? Control?) activate the voice of the thunder (A bomb? A cloud-seeding airplane?) and although it shatters their world to ruins, it opens the path for "a damp gust bringing rain" and, eventually, peace.

Lop. Lop. Lop.



by **Chris Aylott**

Once upon a time, roleplaying games were leisurely affairs. Adventures stretched for hours, and there was always time for a digression, a snack, or a long discussion of just how to whack the Orcus over the head and take his wand.

Those days are gone in the hyper-acceleration of the Internet Age. There's always time for snacks and digressions, but actual playing time is getting hard to find.

Fear not! There are Solutions. With these helpful hints -- and just a bit of GM sadism -- you'll be blazing through adventures and still a few minutes to call the pizza delivery.

***PARANOIA* combat -- it's not just for *PARANOIA* any more**

Greg Costikyan's *Paranoia* is one of the comedy classics of roleplaying, but any game can use its fundamental combat principle: fights are fast and scary. If you need to think, you're already dead.

Paranoia GMs point at their players and give them three seconds or less to announce an action. If a player dithers, his character does nothing. Players quickly learn that almost any action -- even an insanely risky one -- is better than doing nothing at all.

The toughest part about this kind of point-and-shoot style is keeping the current situation clear for the players. Quick recaps at the beginning of each combat round can help, but a flexible attitude helps even more. If the player misplaces a piece of scenery or mixes up the situation a little, roll with it! An exciting combat action beats an argument over continuity any day.

Reward impulsiveness

Most tricks and traps are designed to punish the foolhardy. This is a good thing; nothing feels better than folding, mangling and spindling a player character who really should have known better. But players have a discouraging tendency to learn from these experiences, and careful players are just a step away from being dull players.

The fast GM encourages his players to kick that door open and march on through. They'll never believe that you have their best interests at heart -- they're not dumb -- so give them some incentives. Let them surprise the stormtroopers on a cigarette break, or spot the secret door just as someone closes it. Make them glad they just charged on in.

Players aren't dumb, but they are optimists. Give them a reasonably equal mix of reward and trickery and they'll hope for the reward every time. Then they'll walk right into your vicious scything spiky door trap.

Be illiterate

We all love rulebooks. They inspire, they illuminate, they resolve potentially life-threatening disputes about the weight of tech level 9 batteries.

Throw them out.

Okay, you can keep them on the table, where they look authoritative and can backstop your dice throws. Don't open them. If you don't have the answer memorized, make it up. Every minute you spend looking things up is a minute without clever dialogue, breath-taking descriptions, or obscene damage rolls.

You can't keep your players out of the books, of course. Most PCs are complex enough that their players need to look up a couple of maneuvers or spells during the game. That's fine -- but don't let them do it when you're interacting with them. They can look things up when you're dealing with other players. If you need an answer now and they don't know it, make it up.

Make the clock tick.

Deadlines have a marvelous way of focusing the attention -- especially deadly deadlines. The ticking bomb, the sinking fuel gauge, and the parents driving back from Schenectady all give the players a reason to pick one of their plans and put it into action.

Don't be afraid to let time pass a little faster than is realistic. Sure, the players' discussion may have only been going on for ten minutes, but you can count down a lot more game time if you like. If you're compressing game hours into a few minutes, it helps to let the scenery reinforce the clock. Tell them how bad their 23rd cup of coffee tastes, or describe the lengthening shadows as the sun sets and the vampires get ready to feed again.

It doesn't hurt to review the players' options and plans as you count down to your ominous deadline. If they're having trouble deciding, you can even steer them towards or away from a particular plan as you recap. If they can't decide which side of the cliff to go up, you can emphasize the slick, dangerous rocks on one side in your summary of their plan.

Turn the villains loose

Even if you don't have a specific deadline for your heroes, you can move your players along by reminding them that other characters have plans of their own. If they know Dr. Zargo has nearly assembled his Orbital Cattle Prod, they'll know they have to get moving and stop him.

A little third-person omniscient description can be very helpful here. Shift the scene, showing them just enough about what the villains are doing to get them worried. The early Bond films are a perfect example of how to use this technique -- Ernst Stavro Blofeld plotted against Bond for years, and moviegoers saw nothing of him but his hands and his fluffy white cat.

"Wipe them out. All of them."

Raymond Chandler was right. Nothing kick-starts a plot like two thugs firing tommy guns through the window. If the players get stuck, don't hesitate to get them moving with a few well-placed bullets.

There's a catch. Some players will take the threat of violence as a reward, not as a plot complication. Unless there's a cost, players have every reason to sit back and let the GM make things easier for them.

The men with the tommy guns should be more than a hint and an empty threat. Shoot at a PC or two. Wound or even kill one. Kidnap a Dependent. Destroy Earthforce One. The PCs should always learn something important from an encounter that puts the plot back in gear, but they should also pay a price for that knowledge.

The equipment montage

If the players are running scared -- if they know they have to plan fast before they act and think on their feet when they do -- then most of your battle for gaming time is won. Just one more deadly trap threatens your game.

The shopping trip.

Players love gear. Nobody knows why. It's not like their stuff is really going to help them, because you're going to make sure they break, lose, or expend anything that would make their lives too easy. Maybe they just want to distract you with long equipment lists.

Don't let them. Hide the lists under those rulebooks you're not opening. Let each player decide whether her character has a little stuff, some stuff, or lots of stuff. Assign appropriate encumbrance penalties and use it as a guide to determine how likely they are to have the specific item they need. That gives them room to be creative and puts the focus on how they use their equipment instead of how much stuff they can write down ahead of time.

Of course, this method misses out on one of the grand old traditions of heroic fiction: the "arming the hero" scene, where a story's protagonist straps his special armor and weapons and prepares for a great battle. Achilles had his arming the hero scene when he went to fight Hector. So did Aeneas and Neo, and your players deserve one too.

Enter a fast-paced "arming the hero" scene for the television era. It's the *A-Team* Equipment Montage.

Just before the final confrontation of every *A-Team* episode, Hannibal Smith and his merry men would work up the Gadget of the Week. The theme music would play. Materials would be gathered. Mr. T would weld. At the end of the scene, they had just what they needed to defeat the Bad Guy.

With the magic of nostalgia, you can do this too. Go from player to player, giving each of them a "camera shot" to describe a piece of equipment they are obtaining or preparing. Let their creativity run wild -- if it's even remotely plausible for them to find or create the item in question, they can have it. They can each get their own item or they can work together to create one big Gadget of the Week.

Hum the *A-Team* theme while they describe their contributions. It adds atmosphere -- and the montage ends when you finish the theme. If they don't keep their scenes brief, somebody doesn't get a turn. With a little practice, they'll learn to pace themselves so that they're ready just as the theme ends -- just like on TV.

Will their special gear be useful? Maybe -- this is gaming, not fiction, and not everything happens according to plan. But if they've been using their heads, it should be easy to work at least some of their toys into the climax of the adventure.

One more thing: don't forget to include a shot of Mr. T welding. Sometimes playing fast has to take a back seat to tradition.



A Variant for Dino Hunt

by P.D. Magnus

"Last Tuesday, a temporal rift opened in the Pacific Ocean off the coast of Southern California. Scientists at Scripps Oceanographic Institute report that it was caused by solar flares leading to shifting tachyon densities beneath the Earth's crust. Some local leaders lay blame the scientists themselves, echoing rumors that the Navy has been performing offshore tests of a parachronic weapon. Whatever the cause, the rift has drifted toward the coast and made land fall near the city of San Diego. Creatures from the prehistoric past, dragged across the timestream, are terrorizing communities up and down the coast. There is hope that the effect will subside eventually, but will that be before or after the city is destroyed?"

Dino Hunt is a great game, but it doesn't really give the dinosaurs a chance to cut loose. Jurassic Park, a movie about a dinosaur zoo, had a sequel in which a dinosaur rampages across San Diego. Now Dino Hunt, the game about collecting for dinosaur zoos, has a variant in which hordes of dinosaurs stalk through the city!

In Dino Rampage, each player takes the role of a team of scientists with a time machine, defending the city and attempting to send the wayward dinosaurs back to their own time.

What You'll Need

- 1 pawn for each player
- 1 Energy Track for each player
- 1 Energy Marker for each player
- a pile of dinosaur cards from Dino Hunt
- 3 6-sided dice
- the City Map
- 8 Mission cards

Most of these are in the Dino Hunt boxed set. You'll need to provide 2 dice of your own. The City Map and Mission Cards are provided here as a PDF file, which you can read and print out from Adobe's Acrobat Reader. If you don't have Acrobat, you can get it for free at <http://www.adobe.com/products/acrobat/readstep.html>. They are also provided as JPG files.

You can print the map and cards on cardstock if you like, but you won't have to move them around or handle them once the game gets started. Printing them on paper works just fine.

[Click to download the City Map and Mission Cards in PDF](#)

Starting the Game

1. Shuffle the Dinosaur cards. Set the Specials aside; you won't need them to play Dino Rampage.

As in Dino Hunt, the size of the Dinosaur deck controls the length of the game. Moreover, in Dino Rampage a larger Dinosaur deck increases the likelihood that the saurians will gain the upper hand and destroy parts of the city.

2. Shuffle the Mission deck. Each player draws one Mission Card, looks at it, and keeps it hidden until the game is over. Put the rest of the Mission deck aside.
3. Put the City Map in the center of the table. The map represents the coastline, running from Tijuana, Mexico north to Ocean Beach, California.
4. Each player gets an Energy Track and an Energy Marker. Decide who goes first in some equitable way. Play proceeds clockwise.

How The City Gets Destroyed

The Score listed on each Dinosaur card is a rough measure of its ferocity. Each neighborhood has a maximum dinosaur capacity, indicated in the lower right of each on the City Map. If the total Score of the dinosaurs in a neighborhood ever exceeds this number, that neighborhood is destroyed. When this happens, immediately gather the Dinosaur cards from that neighborhood together in a stack and put them face down on top of the space on the Map.

Since the neighborhood is destroyed, there is no longer any point in hunting the dinosaurs there. No new dinosaurs may be placed there. If dinosaurs flee an adjacent neighborhood, they pass through the destroyed neighborhood to one on the other side.

Coronado Island and Downtown are two separate areas. To put dinosaurs in Coronado, place the Dinosaur cards above the City Map. To put them Downtown, place the cards below the Map. Coronado and Downtown have their own maximum capacities, and it is possible for one to be destroyed while the other remains.

Taking a Turn

1. *Recharge!* Move your Energy Marker to 10.
2. *Watch for Dinosaurs!* Take the top 3 cards from the Dinosaur deck and roll the dice. Each die indicates where one of the Dinosaur cards must go. Each neighborhood corresponds to a number, as indicated on the City Map. For each 6 you roll, you may decide where to place one of the dinosaurs. Although the dice determine where you can place Dinosaurs, you decide which of the three dinosaurs to place in each neighborhood.

If you roll a 1, for instance, then you must put a dinosaur in Tijuana; if you roll two 1's, then you must place two of the dinosaurs in Tijuana; and so on.

If any neighborhood's maximum capacity is exceeded by the dinosaurs you've put down, that neighborhood is destroyed.

Coronado Island and Downtown are two separate neighborhoods. If you roll a 3, you may put a dinosaur in your choice of either Coronado or Downtown.

Hillcrest is an in-land neighborhood, so you can't put any aquatic creatures there.

You can not put dinosaurs in a neighborhood that has already been destroyed. If you roll the number of an area that has been destroyed, put the dinosaur in the next highest area. If all the higher-numbered areas have been

destroyed, put the dinosaur in the area of your choice. For example, if you roll a 1 after Tijuana has been destroyed, then place a dinosaur in National City; if National City has also been destroyed, place it in Coronado or Downtown; and so on.

3. *Protect the City!* Just as in Dino Hunt, you move and hunt on your turn.

Movement

Schlepping your equipment across town requires considerable effort. Moving 1 space along the City Map costs 1 Energy. You should allow extra time when crossing the border; travelling between Tijuana and National City in either direction costs 2 Energy.

Note that Coronado Island and Downtown are separate neighborhoods. It costs 1 Energy to move between them.

The Hunt

To initiate a hunt, announce which dinosaur you intend to hunt. You must be in the same neighborhood as the dinosaur. Roll one die and compare the result to the table on the Dinosaur card for the dinosaur that you are hunting. The tall buildings Downtown make it easy to ambush dinosaurs; if you are hunting Downtown, add +1 to your die roll.

If you roll a "Capture!" result, you have successfully sent the dinosaur back to its home time. Spend the indicated Energy, then remove the Dinosaur card from the Map and put it in front of you. Sending dinosaurs back to the past is one way to score points in Dino Rampage.

If you roll a "Missed!" result, you have failed to send back the dinosaur. Spend the indicated Energy. If you have enough Energy left, you may hunt again.

So far, this is just like hunting in Dino Hunt. However, dinosaurs who escape from hunters in San Diego are still rampaging around the city! If you roll an "Escape!" result, spend the indicated Energy cost but do not remove the Dinosaur card from the table. Instead, move the card to an adjacent neighborhood of your choice. If adding that dinosaur exceeds the neighborhood's maximum capacity, then the neighborhood is destroyed.

If you roll any other result that directs you to discard the Dinosaur card, move the dinosaur to an adjacent neighborhood instead.

If a dinosaur flees toward an adjacent neighborhood that is already destroyed, put the Dinosaur card in the first neighborhood in that direction that is not destroyed. When only one neighborhood remains, there is nowhere else for the dinosaur to go; leave it where it is.

Balboa Park is home to the San Diego Zoo. Dinosaurs fleeing through the park may wander into the zoo and settle down, belaying their rampage. Any time a dinosaur flees from Coronado or Downtown into Hillcrest or from Hillcrest into Coronado or Downtown, roll a die. On a roll of 5 or 6, the dinosaur has wandered into the zoo. Remove it from the Map and set it aside. It does not go into anyone's pile. This is the only way besides a successful hunt that dinosaurs can be removed from the Map.

Ending the Game

The game ends when either all the dinosaurs have been hunted successfully or all the neighborhoods have been destroyed.

Your score is the total Score value of all the dinosaurs you sent home, plus a bonus if you've completed your Mission.

Mission Cards

There are eight Mission cards which give players secret goals during the game. The PDF file contains the cards in nicely-formatted card shapes, but for your convenience the text of the cards is given below.

- **Diplomacy:** If Tijuana is not destroyed, you get a 20 point bonus at the end of the game.
- **Gaslamp:** If Downtown is not destroyed, you get a 40 point bonus at the end of the game.
- **Hotel Investor:** If Coronado Island is not destroyed, you get a 50 point bonus at the end of the game.
- **Nationalist:** If National City is not destroyed, you get a 30 point bonus at the end of the game.
- **Pride:** If Hillcrest is not destroyed, you get a 30 point bonus at the end of the game.
- **Surf:** If Ocean Beach is not destroyed, you get a 25 point bonus at the end of the game.
- **Terrorist:** You get a 10 point bonus at the end of the game for each neighborhood that is destroyed.
- **Zoo Keeper:** You get a bonus equal to the value of any dinosaurs that fled into Balboa Park and stayed in the zoo.

Further Variation

Although many Specials (like Extinctions) are inappropriate for Dino Rampage, others would work just fine. You could easily sort out the latter and use them to spice up the game. To turn things up even more, try Dino Rampage with custom decks. See the [Deck-Building Rules](#) from several months back.

No Place Like Home



by **Dmitri Scull**

Where one lives is an important facet of one's personality, especially if one has a physical or spiritual link to that home, such as many fantasy races do. From the mythical dryads and naiads, to beings from other realities, many races have ties that bind them to their home.

The following optional advantage and disadvantages for *GURPS* represent such ties (or lack thereof, in the case of Wanderlust) that a race or individual might have. While most of the following are supernatural in nature, Territorial and Wanderlust can be taken by anyone (and many animals are naturally Territorial). In addition, Linked Personality Shift, if taken to represent an animal character's reactions to the seasons, is also quite fitting.

Merging **20 points**

The character can merge his or her essence with a single, inanimate object, such as a tree, a forest glade, a river, lake, or mountain. It need not be a natural object, but such is most likely. While "inside" the object, the character is invisible and intangible, although some magical forms of detection might be able to find him or her. While using this power, the character is effectively in sensory deprivation. Note that the character is not really inside the item, and damaging it does not harm the character (unless the character has a disadvantage which causes it to).

Special Enhancement: The character can sense the immediate surroundings of the area, as if he or she were there. 10 points.

Special Enhancement: Rather than a single item, the character can bond with a closely related group of items, such as any tree in a given forest; this costs 10 points. If the character can bond with a loosely related group of items, such as any oak tree or any point in a single ocean, it costs 20 points. If the character can bond with a broad classification of items, such as any tree, open ground, any stone, it costs 40 points.

Special Limitation: The character's outline is faintly visible in the merged object. -10 points.

Banishment **-5, -10, or -15 points**

This disadvantage is only available to races that frequent planes of existence other than the one they are native to. Upon being struck by a certain attack, they are expelled from their current plane, back to their native one. Rarity of the attack sets the value of the disadvantage; very common attacks (metal weapons) are worth -15 points, occasional ones (fire, ice, poison) are worth -10 points, and rare attacks (water, holy water) are worth -5.

The base rules for the Banishment disadvantage assume that there is nothing to prevent the character from returning immediately, other than whatever mechanism the character possesses to do so. The following enhancements can be used to simulate more permanent conditions of banishment. Note that if the return time is less than a week, this is normally a special effect of "normal" Banishment, unless the campaign involves extensive, easy and cheap planar travel.

- If the character is prevented from returning to the plane he was visiting for a week to a month, double the cost of the disadvantage.

- If the character is prevented from returning for a month to a year, triple the cost of the disadvantage.
- If the character is prevented from returning for a year to a decade, multiply the cost of the disadvantage by four.
- If the character is prevented from ever returning, multiply the cost of the disadvantage by five. This can also be used to simulate long banishment times, such as a lifetime or a century, as the character will likely not be able to return to the plane during the campaign (or have reason to, after so long), even if the character will still be alive.

Special Enhancement: If the character gets a HT roll to resist banishment, halve the cost of the disadvantage.

Linked Fate **-15 points**

The character's fate is linked to a specific area or item, such as a tree, grove, building, statue, lake, or other natural or artificial feature. If the linked item is damaged, the character suffers a proportional amount of damage, which cannot heal until the target heals or is repaired. If the item is destroyed, the character is slain, instantly.

Special Enhancement: The character can survive the destruction of the item; the character will not be reduced below negative hits (the character does still have to make survival rolls) from damage to the item. This reduces the disadvantage value to -5 points.

Special Enhancement: The character still dies and is destroyed with the item, but if it is rebuilt, the character will return to life. This only applies to death due to loss of the linked item. To represent such healing of damage from other causes buy Regeneration or Resurrection. This reduces the disadvantage value to -10 points.

Linked Personality Shift **-10 points**

The character's personality waxes and wanes with the cycles of something else. This can be just about anything changeable, from the tides, to a river, the weather, the seasons, or the growth cycle of a forest. This is essentially the Lunacy Disadvantage; only broader in scope. When the linked item is in an "up phase," (high tide, spring and summer, active weather) the character is at -2 to all Will rolls due to increased emotional variance. On a "down phase" (low tide, fall and winter, summer doldrums) the character effectively has the Laziness disadvantage. Volatile changes (floods, storms, storm surges) make the character hurried and distracted, giving the character the Impulsive disadvantage.

Territorial **-15 points**

The character is especially attached to a specific location. He must make a Will roll to leave, and a Will roll each day to remain away from the location. Each week the character has been gone imposes a cumulative -2 penalty to the Will roll. If the character fails the Will roll, he must do everything in his power to return to his home. A critical success "resets" the character as if he just left. If the character is physically bound to the location, buy it as a Dependency.

Wanderlust **-15 points**

The character has problems staying in one place for more than a few weeks or a month at most; the character will want to move on and see new things after only a short time in a new location. At the end of each week after the first, the character must make a Will roll to see if he can remain in the area; this roll is at a cumulative -1 penalty for every two weeks after the first Will roll. Such a character is unlikely to own anything more than he or she can carry; although the character could instead have a mobile home or boat that he or she lives on.

Pyramid Review

Gramercy Island (for Heroes Unlimited)

Published by [Palladium Books](#)



Written by **Bill Coffin**

\$20.95; 224 Pages

How is it that I can read two books, by the same author, in the same setting, and enjoy one so much more than the other?

Gramercy Island is the second book in the [Century Station](#) setting for *Heroes Unlimited*. It describes the super-prison Gramercy Island in the *Century Station* setting (although Gramercy Island is generic enough that it can be slotted into any setting with minimal problems: Take one island, add a prison. Tah-dah!).

Super Prison is used literally here, because Gramercy Island is the prison where Century Station's various super-powered/paranormal felons and crooks (as well as the mundane scofflaws) are sent to serve their time.

Unfortunately, *Gramercy Island* doesn't quite give the same oomph that *Century Station* did. It feels more like a standard character catalogue than a cohesive sourcebook on the level *Century Station* was.

The first ten pages of the book detail prison life. It's a fairly well written description of prison life (and seems to be accurate . . . as far as I know from watching *Shawshank Redemption* and occasional trailers for *Oz*). The glossary of prison terms is also interesting, but I won't make any statements about its genuineness. Prison is a fairly surreal existence, an alien society so separate from our every day lives that I'm pretty sure it would be easy enough to use the information in here in any incarceration facility.

The next section has info about the prison itself. This is the most satisfying segment of the book; we're given information on the history of Gramercy Island (it could be argued that there's more pirates in this book than *7th Sea!*), and how it came to be a prison. There's also a map of the island that lays out the numerous wings and areas.

Therein lies one major problem I have with the book's layout of Gramercy Island. Each Supers containment wing has an evidence depot. While it may fit in with some genre conventions, having the "super-gadget depot" in the same building as the super villainous gadgeteers just strikes me as stupid on a cosmic scale. This allows for good breakout scenarios (since many of the villains are gadget-based), but also requires the prison's designers to have been very, very stupid.

Prison security is composed of normal human guards and robots constructed under Operation Argonaut. The prison staff work nicely, although the Warden's great secret is a bit too ambiguous, and could have been expanded a bit. The information is given, and is followed by two paragraphs of short question sentences (Who? What? Where? When? Why? How? WHY?).

The remainder of the book, detailing the various inmates of Gramercy Island, is entertaining enough. There is a section on villain teams and solo scoundrels; the teams tend to be a bit more interesting, if only because they have clever concepts behind them.

The Dynosaurs, for example, are a combat team composed of mutant animals (guess what kind; come on, take a guess) that are named after characters from Shakespeare. The Body Shots are a team of brawlers and hand-to-hand combatants, and include a refugee from Clockwork Orange and an android butt-kicker.

Art-wise, *Gramercy Island* is consistent with most Palladium books; the art ranges from okay to great, never straying too far from the genre.

There is a layout issue that seems to have popped up in recent Palladium books. An ad is included in the back of the book (standard procedure for most games these days), but instead of being in the back of the book, its on page 211 of the 224-page book.

Super prisons have always been an interesting aspect of every super heroic RPG. From Project Pegasus to Belle Reeve, crime and punishment in a four-color world is something that every supers GM will have to look at eventually. The first 60 or so pages of *Gramercy Island* will be useful to supers GMs as source material. The rest of the book, unfortunately, appeals mostly to people using *Heroes Unlimited* (although some of the villains and teams look interesting enough to port to other systems).

-- *Justin Mohareb*

Murphy's Rules



by John Kovalic

Murphy's Rules



Murphy's Rules



A Brief, Sketchy History of Quirky Time

It was October 15th, 1189. King Richard of England needed to raise money for the crusades, and so was selling the titles to some of the lands he controlled . . . like, say, Wales, where a certain sidhe noble princess (who had "PC" stamped on her forehead) reigned. While she was negotiating with the king's representative to purchase the rights to these lands, I was taking notes on this historic event in my duty as the timekeeper.

Did you know that October 15th was a Sunday?

But I get ahead of myself.

It began years earlier . . . around 1049, if my notes are to be believed. The vampire knight and immortal sidhe (aka "the party") were roaming across England and Europe, having the kind of adventures that new characters do. ("Oh, no; bandits! We'd better be careful!") Traveling overland in the Middle Ages, time tends to pass pretty quickly (especially when you're an unaging fae or vampire). As such the need to keep careful track of time wasn't high on our priority list.

But after several years of adventuring we settled down in her fledgling kingdom. My vampire roamed off, and I started playing a mage. Oh, and there were werewolves in the area that she and her allies needed to befriend.

So we were invited along to meet with the werewolves one evening. My mage -- a cautious sort -- asked innocently enough, "Um . . . before I go, what's the phase of the moon?"

A long silence. We players stared at the GM.

"Oh, and how should I dress?" I continued. "What month is it?"

Like some kind of Wile E. Coyote contraption, the current adventure sprang apart at two innocent questions.

Because we realized that we didn't have the foggiest idea what day it was . . . or even what month it was. After a few minutes, we were pretty sure we knew what year it was. But there was no way on Gaia's green earth we knew what phase the moon was in.

It was at that point I designated myself as the campaign timekeeper.

Unfortunately, we realized that we didn't have a clue about how to make our timekeeping realistic. This was before the calendar reformation, so none of the "traditional" means of determining a calendar (like the perpetual ones found in almanacs) would work. But after a little bit of thought at work one day I realized: Why do we care? I mean, how accurate and realistic do we *really* need to be in a world where the undead roam the earth and hold political office?

And that's when I created The Calendar:

January	February	March	April
S M T W T F S	S M T W T F S	S M T W T F S	S M T W T F S
1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
8 9 10 11 12 13 14	8 9 10 11 12 13 14	8 9 10 11 12 13 14	8 9 10 11 12 13 14
15 16 17 18 19 20 21	15 16 17 18 19 20 21	15 16 17 18 19 20 21	15 16 17 18 19 20 21
22 23 24 25 26 27 28	22 23 24 25 26 27 28	22 23 24 25 26 27 28	22 23 24 25 26 27 28
May	June	July	August
S M T W T F S	S M T W T F S	S M T W T F S	S M T W T F S

1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
8 9 10 11 12 13 14	8 9 10 11 12 13 14	8 9 10 11 12 13 14	8 9 10 11 12 13 14
15 16 17 18 19 20 21	15 16 17 18 19 20 21	15 16 17 18 19 20 21	15 16 17 18 19 20 21
22 23 24 25 26 27 28	22 23 24 25 26 27 28	22 23 24 25 26 27 28	22 23 24 25 26 27 28

September October November December

S M T W T F S	S M T W T F S	S M T W T F S	S M T W T F S
1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
8 9 10 11 12 13 14	8 9 10 11 12 13 14	8 9 10 11 12 13 14	8 9 10 11 12 13 14
15 16 17 18 19 20 21	15 16 17 18 19 20 21	15 16 17 18 19 20 21	15 16 17 18 19 20 21
22 23 24 25 26 27 28	22 23 24 25 26 27 28	22 23 24 25 26 27 28	22 23 24 25 26 27 28

At a casual glance, you will notice several interesting points about this calendar. On the one hand, it's completely wrong. On the other hand, it's completely intuitive. It roughly aligns with the phases of the moon (we designated the 28th/1st as the full moon). Each day is the same in each month, and in each year. August 15th was the same as January 15th which was the same as October 15th.

Which was a Sunday.

It was portable; three years could fit on a sheet of paper, and you can just tally off days as they happen (with notes on paper or in the margins if necessary). It was perpetual; I could print up a stack of 10 sheets and know we'd be okay to handle our immortal characters for a few decades.

And, after thinking about it, we also realized this was a good simulation of the timekeeping precision (or lack thereof) of the times. To make our calendar work out, we added festival and saints' days as needed, with the 12 Days of Christmas filling out the end of the year nicely.

When we moved on to other campaigns, we had an easier time. We decided the *Fading Suns* universe used our current calendar; the trick was finding a calendar computer program that could handle the year 4996. (I eventually needed to hex edit the save file of one program, since the only choice they offered was "click right arrow to advance a year" . . . which is a pain if you need to do it 2996 times.) With the computer programs we could be a bit more "realistic," and print out nice-looking calendars with little boxes to record notes as needed. And moving to *Aberrant*, set in the year 2008, was a piece of cake.

So for you players who are looking to help out the overworked GM, why don't you volunteer to be the timekeepers? It's pretty easy (especially depending on the method you use), adds a level of realism, and gives you a sense of history and continuity.

But regardless, I'll always have a fondness for my first calendar, where every month has a Friday the 13th, Easter is always on April 22nd, and characters' birthdays (and anniversaries . . . like October 15, 1189) are always on the same day.

* * *

Unfortunately, John Kovalic's in Germany now, so we won't have a *Dork Tower* for the next couple of weeks. Rest assured, however, that DT (like Bond) will be back. Have fun, John!

-- Steven Marsh

* * *

Last week's answer: Castle Greyhawk, p. 77.

(one star):

"Survey Control, a mutant space amoeba just ate the stardrive! What do we do now?"

"Survey 1138, it will take about a month to route a rescue craft to you. Meanwhile, the scientific staff want some information on the amoeba. Here's Dr. Gzing."

Gzing here, Survey 1138. What color is that amoeba? Please send somebody out to take its temperature. Can you tell if it's carnivorous?"



by **Bob Portnell**

Around the World in 80 Thrills is a four-part Cliffhangers adventure set in the 1930s (the popular "world on the brink of war" setting). One part will appear each month from now until May. Each part is written by a different author, making this also a Round Robin event:

- Part One: [The Kensington Codex](#) -- Steven Marsh
- Part Two: [The Steps of Chiushan](#) -- James Maliszewski
- Part Three -- Bob Portnell
- Part Four: [The Atlantis Crystal](#) -- Steve Kenson

Stats are presented for **GURPS**. Additional stats appearing for **Fudge** presented in **bold italic red**. Stats for **Big Eyes, Small Mouth 2nd Edition** have also been presented in blue boxes with white text. The adventures should also be generic enough that they can be used in a variety of systems.

"When Suddenly . . ."

"That will be far enough," the heavily French-accented voice said. The blindfolds are pulled from your eyes and you blink, even in the dim light of the gas lanterns around the room. The light creates strange and unnerving shadows, dancing around the bone-lined walls of the chamber.

Surrounding you is a large group of men, most armed with pistols, some with knives, all with smug expressions. Across the damp chamber a man waits, grinning, next to a seated figure. This figure is well-tied to the chair, and has a hood covering its head, but the clothing is very rumpled and very familiar to you.

The man says, in his thickly accented English, "If you have brought the item we wish, you may take your friend and go. If not, you shall join the other millions here who are dead." He waits for your reply.

What do you do?

What's Going On?

The Empire of Death

Most major cities have made use of the underground spaces . . . for rail tunnels, utility services, emergency shelters, armament storage, and so on. In the late Eighteenth Century, with ground level land at a premium and medieval cemeteries occupied beyond capacity, the City of Paris undertook to relocate the populations of numerous cemeteries into mass graves in disused underground vaults. Some of these chambers & tunnels date back to the Roman Empire.

Over seven million skeletons and corpses were moved, quietly in the night, over a fifteen month span in 1785

One of the group's members has been kidnapped! The kidnappers' telegrams demanded they meet them near the Eiffel Tower on a specific date and time, and that they bring a specific small and valuable object as the ransom. They made the rendezvous, were blindfolded, and taken for a short drive around the city, then led on foot deep into the Catacombs of Paris (see sidebar).

If you have been following the *Around the World In 80 Thrills* series, the kidnap victim should most reasonably be Jill Spires, daughter and assistant of Professor Reginald Spires. The heroes have been following clues in a mystery first uncovered in an archaeological site in Minnesota, then further revealed on a mountain in China. After returning to Shanghai and preparing to book passage back to California, the adventurer party finds that Jill has been kidnapped, her rooms ransacked. Telegrams with ransom demands (specifically for the Key the party carries, found in "The Kensington Codex") arrived a few days later.

Given the travel time between Shanghai and Paris (as much as a month or as little as two weeks, depending on the mode of travel), the GM may wish to stage other adventures along the way. Calcutta and Cairo are ideal hotbeds of intrigue which may distract the player group as they attempt to make their way to the city of lights to rescue Jill. If this is done, the GM should emphasize the deadline, subtly reinforcing the pressure on the players.

Of course, it's perfectly in keeping with the genre to just "follow the dashed line as it moves across the map," carrying our heroes directly from Shanghai to the rendezvous at the Eiffel Tower.

In The Catacombs

There's nothing like a big blood-stirring fight to kick off the adventure with a bang. The heroes are intended to win, and collect the next bit of information they need: a clue leading to the man behind the kidnapping, who is apparently aware of the Key (or whatever small treasure). The gang leader was to leave the parceled key in a luggage locker at the main railway station; he would return the next day to find other half of their "fee" for the job. The gang leader bears telegrams with these instructions; they were sent from an address in Vienna by a person named "Rudolf S. Habsburg." The players need to keep one of the bad guys alive long enough to collect this information.

If the players fail to collect this information directly from the character, they may find it on his body, or on his person . . . or in the last resort, the kidnap victim/Jill can mention that she overheard this sensitive information. "Victim"/Jill will seem very shaken, occasionally forgetting characters' names and just confused in general.

If the players are extremely devious, they might let the gang leader have the key to complete his assignment. They might then keep watch on the locker, to see who makes the pick-up. If they do, they will catch another generic French thug, with directions to switch parcels and to

and 1786. Bones were used to line the chambers, to reinforce the archways, to create artistic images on the walls. The natural cool and damp of the Catacombs serve only to reinforce the atmosphere of mystery and wonder.

In the generations since, monarchs have held parties in the underground. In World War II, the French Resistance kept a headquarters there. It is a captivating setting for adventures of almost any genre and an interesting place just to visit.

Gang Leader (he can be given a suitably cliched French name if desired)

ST: 10 (*Fair*)

DX: 12 (*Good*)

IQ: 12 (*Good*)

HT: 11 (*Fair*)

Speed: 5.75; **Move:** 5

Dodge: 6

Lt. Leather Jacket (PD 1, DR 1), no encumbrance.

Advantages:

Combat Reflexes

Charisma +2.

Disadvantages:

Social Status -1 (Criminal)

Addiction (Tobacco).

Skills:

Brawling-14 (*Good*)

Guns (Rifle)-14 (*Good*)

Guns (Pistol)-14 (*Good*)

Knife-14 (*Good*)

Merchant-12 (*Fair*)

10 points in other skills.

Languages:

French-12 (*Fair*)

English-11 (*Mediocre*).

Weapons: Large Knife, small caliber pistol (Walther PPK or similar).

mail the key to a specific address in France. (Don't tell the players, but the Bad Guys are *already* watching them . . .)

On The Road

The players can choose their own means, of course, but the most direct route between Paris and Vienna (by rail or road) passes the southern part of Nazi Germany. Players whose passports, identity cards, or other travel documents are even the slightest bit out of order will find themselves detained at the borders (entering or leaving Germany), to spend some time in the unpleasant company of government bureaucrats and security officers. These are just your normal stiff-necked civil servants; please do not indulge in war-movie melodramatics ("Ve haff wayz uff making you talk!") . . . unless you really want to, of course.

Depending on how broadly or subtly the GM plays this, it may happen that the adventuring party discovers a rather important piece of information: the companion they rescued isn't the same person who was kidnapped! The person/Jill was indeed kidnapped by members of the Black Pinnacle Society in Shanghai and spirited away to one of their secret lairs. There a duplicate was made by means mysterious and sinister -- the same means they use to make the endlessly identical henchmen encountered in "Ashes to Ashes."

When exposed, the duplicate is found to have extremely limited knowledge: basics of the original's background and skills only. The GM is free to install any red herrings here that he wishes, but the only pieces of information the duplicate has is:

1. The adventurers must be led to Crete and the Labyrinth by the speediest reasonable means.
2. By this time, the original is already there, healthy but in relative discomfort.
3. Their progress is being closely monitored.

This ought to be good to crank up the paranoia level a notch or two!

Sometime during the trip (probably during some unexpected stopover or inspection) the players will make the acquaintance of another detained traveler, the British journalist Percy Aubrey-Smith. "Bloody bureaucrats," Aubrey-Smith explains. "One brief jaunt home to prove to my esteemed Fleet Street masters that I am, indeed, still able to cash pay drafts . . . and in both directions, questions, detentions and distractions." He, too, is on his way to Vienna to resume his duties as a correspondent for the London Daily Crier. Aubrey can make an excellent tour guide for the Imperial City, if asked; otherwise, he'll carry on back into his work, leaving the players with a business card.

Rudy Doesn't Live Here Anymore

When the players follow up on the telegram address, they find it leads to . . . the Imperial Treasury, repository of records and documents of

Total: 70 points.

Body 7 Mind 8 Soul 7

Attributes

Flunkies -- 4, Highly Skilled -- 4, Heightened Awareness -- 2

Defects

Special Requirement: Tobacco, Wanted (as a criminal)

Skills

Driving -- 1, Gun Combat -- 3, Melee Attack -- 2, Stealth -- 1, Unarmed Attack -- 2, Linguistics -- 1

Gang Members

An assortment of lowlifes from France and from French Indochina.

ST: 10 (*Fair*)

DX: 12 (*Good*)

IQ: 10 (*Fair*)

HT: 10 (*Fair*)

Speed: 5.5; **Move:** 5

Dodge: 5.

Advantages:

None.

Disadvantages:

Various.

Skills:

Guns (Various)-12 (*Fair*)

Knife-12 (*Fair*)

Brawling-12 (*Fair*)

Stealth-10 (*Mediocre*)

Weapons: Assorted cheap pistols, revolvers, knives, saps, etc. (The members from French Indochina -- the colonial name for Vietnam, Thailand, etc. -- can have martial arts weapons and skills, if the player party needs more of a challenge.)

Body 4 Mind 3 Soul 4

the Holy Roman Empire. Inquiries with the librarians will eventually reveal the "sender" of the telegram to be Emperor Rudolf II, who led (badly) at the end of the sixteenth century. If the players don't suggest a look at Rudolf's documents, let the librarian suggest a tour of those sections, since the players have traveled so far. They should have something interesting to take away from Vienna.

While walking to the relevant sections of the archives, the librarian will chatter informatively about the life of Rudolf II . . . how the sickly young man came to the throne, and how he retreated from it to his palace in the Prague, there to study the arts and sciences. Of course, arts and sciences in those days meant alchemy, and Rudolf II was a great believer in alchemy, spending lavish amounts on alchemists. Rudolf sought cures for his ailments (of course), but also for the usual goal of alchemists through time, the Philosopher's Stone, said the transmute base metals to gold and to create a potion that would bestow immortality.

The party is halted in a set of musty shelves of books and scrolls. "Here we are!" the librarian says. "I encourage you to look about." He watches all that they do, ready to answer questions and correct mishandlings of the artifacts.

Never underestimate the power of coincidence and luck in pulp adventuring. While rummaging through the musty old parchments, one player will find a letter . . . with one section of markings identical to the runes found on the Key (and the Chinese urn)! Appropriately skilled heroes can translate the parts of the letter in German . . . or they can ask the librarian.

It is a letter from a Greek alchemist to the Emperor. He reports success in creating the stone of transmutation, and will be happy to demonstrate it to the Emperor at any time. (The Emperor died not long after and made no such trip, the librarian would note.) The paragraph of symbology interrupts the text. The closing of the letter reports that, for safekeeping, the stone has been entrusted to "the prisoner of Minos."

Adventurers with a classical education -- and the librarian -- will be aware that Minos was the king of Crete in mythology, one-time patron to the inventor (alchemist?) Daedalus. Minos' wife apparently had intimate relations with Zeus (in the guise of a bull) and gave birth to a child with a brawny human body and a steer's head. Minos imprisoned this "Minotaur" in a maze designed by Daedalus.

Moving Right Along

The next major set-piece is (of course) in Crete and the Labyrinth of Knossos. If the players have not figured this out for themselves, there are several ways the GM can steer them in the right direction. First, the duplicate might give themselves away in a particularly obvious fashion (perhaps the original is a non-smoker and the duplicate gets caught lighting up in private). Or a conversation with Percy Aubrey-Smith might help them choose this option. Percy is willing to help, in fact --

Skills

Gun Combat -- 2, Unarmed Attack -- 2,
Unarmed Defense -- 1

The Orient-Express

This rail line from Paris to Constantinople set the standard for plush train travel from Victorian times to the 1970s and, thanks to the works of Agatha Christie and Graham Green, carries a perpetual aura of mystery and wonder. Not that it needed their help; the Orient-Express was always a focus for intrigue and adventure. The infamous spy "Mata Hari" was a frequent customer. The train has been ambushed by kidnappers and robbers, held in quarantine for cholera outbreaks on the train, and attacked by terrorists (in 1931, easily within recent memory for our characters and the people they meet). Setting an adventure aboard this train would be a very natural occurrence in our pulp setting. The trip from Paris to Vienna would take just two days, so it'll need to be a fast-moving adventure . . .

The Imperial City in the Late Thirties

Vienna retains much of the appearance it had during its tenure as a capital of the Holy Roman Empire. Careful planning of parks, roads, and newer buildings have helped the city retain the visual charm of its older days.

Unfortunately, the political life in Vienna is not as placid. Vienna after "The Great War" is a city in partial search of an identity. The treaties which ended World War I broke the Austro-Hungarian Empire (last vestige of Charlemagne's Holy Roman Empire) into smaller republics. Vienna had been

he has a Grumman amphibian (see sidebar) that will make the trip with no trouble at all. Finally, a call to Professor Spires back in California and his encouragement or direction may do the trick.

GMs can fill out the visit to Vienna with encounters with the famous (like Dr. Freud), or visits to centers of culture (like the Opera). A performance by horses of the Imperial Spanish Riding School is always stirring. (In the film *The Seven Percent Solution*, Sherlock Holmes received a private demonstration of these equines' skills that nearly proved fatal.) And, of course, there are the Nazi sympathizers (or actual Nazis, after 1938) to be avoided or harassed.

Players are free to choose their own routes to Crete, of course. Aubrey-Smith's plane is the most convenient, but road, rail, and ship are always possible. Given the situation at this part of the adventure, incidental encounters during this travel phase are not recommended.

Meet and Crete

>From this point, our adventure resembles a dungeon crawl, or the opening of *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (or the close of *The Last Crusade*). The players reach Crete (if Aubrey-Smith flew them, he bids them go on ahead while he tends to his aircraft) and make their way to the archaeological site at the palace of Knossos. These passages have been excavated and systematically explored for more than a century; there is no danger here. If the heroes are garbed as researchers might be, they will garner no undue attention. Or, if the GM feels like softening the party up a bit, they might encounter a band of desperate looters.

However, there is an as-yet undiscovered chamber. The entrance to this hidden lair is concealed behind a ten-foot tall statue of the Minotaur set into the wall of one of the main galleries. (This is the "prisoner" to whom the alchemist correspondent entrusted the Stone.) Heroes with Traps skills will come into their own for the next part of the adventure, as they find how to open this passage, and to disarm any live traps within this undiscovered section. (Details of these minor traps, if any, are left to the fiendish game master.)

After the obligatory traps, the players pass through a downward sloping passage, about 100 feet (30 meters) in length. At the end, our heroes enter into a large circular chamber. Strange but now familiar glyphs line the walls, a huge stone block roughly 10' by 3' wide by 3' high (3 meters by 1 meter by 1 meter) occupies the enter of the chamber, and on a pedestal at the far side sits a smooth grayish lump of metal.

The trap on the stone should be fairly complicated and vicious, but not insoluble. One possibility: the floor all around the pedestal is false -- one step past the stone block will drop the explorer into a pit of variable depth and lethality. It may take some creative rope or pole work to rig some apparatus to retrieve the Stone across the gap.

In any case, after a good bit of sweat, the PCs should eventually be

accustomed to being the true center of its world, and finds itself merely the capital of a minor country. Worse, the rise of Nazi power in neighboring Germany and the pressure on Austrians to join the Greater Reich causes protests and occasional riots. After the Annexation (*Anschluss*) of 1938, Vienna trades its independence for somewhat increased prominence on the world scene and as part of the growing German realm.

Despite the political chaos and upheaval, on the whole Vienna retains much of the calm charm and sociability of its history. Not much can disturb the "art of living" in Vienna, and the musical and art scene is as vibrant as ever it was. (Recall that Hitler was an art student here, once.) Behavioral sciences are in their formative years; Sigmund Freud still lives at Berggasse 19 during the time of the adventure. The Viennese are by and large friendly and approachable, political activists excepted.

The Grumman "Goose" Amphibian

This is a small twin-engine utility flying boat with wheels, originally built at TL6. It can still be found in use at TL7, with improved fixtures, instruments and turbo-supercharged engines. The Grumman G-21 Amphibian was the first commercial design for Grumman Aircraft Engineering Corporation, intended as a flying limousine for the wealthy. It evolved into a hard-working hauler of passengers or freight, and a very popular vehicle for pulp adventuring. (Louis Lamour used one in his South Seas stories; a "Goose" was featured in the television series "Tales of the Gold Monkey.") The safety and sturdiness of the plane and the reliability of the engines made it a well-respected small craft. It didn't have the range of later amphibians, nor the capacity or luxury, but the versatility of the "Goose"

victorious . . . or so they think. For just as they have the Stone in hand, the kidnappee/Jill backs toward the door, draws a pistol and says (in a voice very unlike the kidnappee/Jill's), "Don't move." She is quickly flanked by another half-dozen men armed with submachine guns.

Some variations here: If the duplicate has been discovered and disarmed, the duplicate will need to quickly steal one of the players' weapons. If the duplicate was left behind (anywhere!) this scene peaks with the duplicate reappearing from the outside, accompanied by the six heavily-armed troops.

From The Jaws of Victory

The face-off continues for some seconds. A voice shouts orders from outside the chamber, and the machine gunners herd the party to one side of the chamber. Two more hirelings enter, carrying the original kidnappee/Jill strapped onto a stretcher. They place their burden on top of the huge stone block, then step away and ready their submachine guns as well.

Finally, the foes' leader makes his entrance. It is Percy Aubrey-Smith. He congratulates his men (in fine Italian) on stopping the spies. He turns to the player group and speaks in English. "Well, we seem to have a sort of stand-off here, do we not? You have the Stone, which I am tasked by my employer to acquire. And I have your colleague."

"Now we could just make an even trade, shake hands and part ways, but I'm inclined to think that neither of us is so trustworthy. So I took the liberty of tying a bomb to your compatriot." Aubrey-Smith gestures at the original kidnappee/Jill on the slab. "I have the dead man switch grasped her in my other hand." He gives it to the duplicate (if present, or a henchman if not). "You will give me the Stone, my little party shall withdraw, and this person will give you the switch. We make our exit in peace, and . . . so do you."

Aubrey-Smith moves to stand near the entrance. "Or I can just shoot the duplicate (the henchman) in the back, and settle the issue straight-away. A bit of delay which my master will dislike, but only a bit. I shall have your decision please. Now."

The players, we hope, will show sense in the face of being outnumbered and outgunned. After the exchange is made, Aubrey says, "Ah, thank you most kindly." A few curt instructions in Italian, and the henchmen begin to back away from the party and out the door. Finally, only Aubrey-Smith is left in the entrance. "One thing more," Aubrey-Smith adds.

"I lied. It is, in fact, a time-bomb and you have about five minutes to live. I wouldn't want you to suffocate in there. Farewell." He closes the entrance to the chamber -- naturally, there seems to be no mechanism for opening it from the inside.

What's Really Happened Here

was unbeatable. G-21s still fly today, most commonly as a "bush" plane.

The write-up below is for the 8-seat passenger version. Stats are a mixture of real performance data and calculated figures from *GURPS Vehicles*. (Don't try to build this at home!) The Goose first flew in 1937; technically, it could be difficult to justify one in Percy's possession. However, the plane is too cool to not use, so we'll ignore that minor detail!

Subassemblies: Retractable wheels (three small wheels, retract into Bo.). Two standard wings. (Flotation pods attached to wings ignored.)

Body Features: Mediocre Hydrodynamics. Fair Streamlining.

Propulsion: Two late TL6 333kW aerial propellers (WiR, WiL), with total 2000 lbs motive thrust.

Instruments & Electronics: TL 6 communicator, medium range (10 mi., HP 2). TL6 navigation instruments (HP 3).

Controls: Mechanical. Duplicate maneuver controls. *Crew Stations:* "Pilot" runs controls from roomy crew station. "Navigator" runs duplicate controls, communicator from roomy crew station. Good visibility.

Occupancy: Short. *Passengers:* 6. *Crew:* Pilot, Navigator. *Accommodations:* Six roomy seats for passengers; fair visibility.

Power System: 2 Pratt & Whitney "Wasp Jr." 333kW TL6 HP gasoline engines (WiL, WiR) power airscrews, HP 38 ea. (See below.) TL6 800kWs lead-acid battery (HP 1) powers communicator & lights when engines are off.

Fuel: TL6 220 gal ultralight fuel tank (fire +3) (Bo) Typical load of 175 gallons aviation gas (fire 16) for 5.5 hours fuel.

Access, Cargo & Empty Space: 20 cf cargo space, 5.3 cf empty space (Bo). 16 cf access space, 10 cf empty space per wing.

Volume: Bo (500 cf). Wings (42 cf each). Wheels (25 cf). *Areas:* Bo (385

Percival Aubrey-Smith is not a globe-trotting reporter but a globe-trotting mercenary, with contacts all across the shadier side of the British Empire. It was he, by direction of his mysterious but generous boss, who arranged the kidnapping in Shanghai through his contacts there. Another hireling sent the telegrams from Vienna to the French gang. His use of the name "Rudolf S. Habsburg" was an inside joke (and perhaps a hint) suggested by his boss, as was the address on the telegrams. His mastery of languages and acting have allowed him over the past year to insinuate himself into the Italian underworld; they trust him well enough to believe his stories of the player group being "spies" and to lend him gunmen for the pursuit. Of course, by the end of the adventure, he no longer needs them or Vienna. He is on his way to America.

What Will You Do? Again?

The escape from the chamber is left as an exercise for the alert player. First priority, of course, will be to separate the weakened kidnappee/Jill (who has spent almost all of the intervening period drugged and has no helpful information) from the explosive. If time remains, the bomb can then be used to destroy the door, though some characters are likely to take damage from flying chips of stone. The players may (and likely will) come up with other more creative solutions.

The head start is ample, though. When the heroes return to the docks, they will find the bad guys long gone.

Join us next month for the fourth and final installment of "Around the World in 80 Thrills."

Links

- The Catacombs of Paris: <http://triggur.org/cata/>
- Compagnie Internationale des Wagons-Lits (operators of the original Orient Express): <http://www.wagons-lits-paris.com/>
- The Grumman Goose: http://www.nasm.edu/nasm/aero/aircraft/grumman_goose.htm
- Vienna, Austria:

sf). Wings (110 sf each). Wheels (52 sf, retractable). Total Area 657 sf.

Structure: Light frame, very expensive materials (all metal).

Hit Points: Body 289. Wings 83 ea. Main Wheels 14 ea; Tail wheel 9.

Armor: Overall PD 2, DR 4 expensive metal.

Statistics: Empty Weight 5005 lbs. Usual payload 2937.5 lbs. (Cargo lightly loaded 10 lbs./cf) Loaded Weight 7942.5 lbs. (3.98 tons) Volume 609 cf. Size Modifier +4. Cost \$110,842. HT 12.

Ground Performance: Top Speed 190 mph. gAccel 10 mph/s. gDecel 10 mph/s. gMR=.25. gSR=3. Very high GP; no off-road.

Aerial Performance: Stall Speed 60 mph. Aerial motive thrust 2000 lbs. Top Speed 220 mph. aAccel 5 mph/s. aMR=4. aSR=3. aDecel=16 mph/s. Takeoff run 90 yds; landing run 90 yds.

Water Performance: Top Speed 20 mph. wAccel 5 mph/s. wMR=.1. wSR=4. wDecel=2 mph/s. Draft 1.5 ft. (These calculated water performance values, particularly Top Speed, are dubious. Flying boats generate lift as they accelerate, reducing their drag. Honest, it really CAN take off from the water. Takeoff run on glassy surface: about 150 yds.)

Pratt & Whitney "Wasp Jr." Air-Cooled Radial Engine. Generates 333 kW. Weighs 800 lbs. Vol. 16 cf. Cruise fuel consumption 32 gallons per hour.

Percival (Percy) Aubrey-Smith

Adult Male, age mid-forties, average height and weight, balding, grey eyes, immaculate pencil-thin mustache. (Think "Higgins" from the *Magnum P.I.* television series, but a bit more trim.)

ST: 11 (*Fair*)

DX: 12 (*Good*)

IQ: 12 (*Good*)

HT: 11 (*Fair*)

Speed: 5.75; **Move:** 5

Dodge: 6, no encumbrance.

Advantages:

Combat Reflexes
Charisma +1
Language Talent +2
Alertness +2
Toughness.

Disadvantages:

Sense of Duty (to employer, -5)
Overconfidence
Secret (high-profile assassin, -20).

Skills:

Guns (Rifle)-15 (*Great*)
Guns (Pistol)-15 (*Great*)
Guns (Submachine Gun)-15 (*Great*)
Knife-14 (*Good*)
Brawling-14 (*Good*)
Leadership-12 (*Fair*)
Merchant-12 (*Fair*)
Stealth-14 (*Good*)
Acting-14 (*Good*)
Savoir-Faire-14 (*Good*)
Streetwise-13 (*Good*)
Piloting (Seaplane)-14 (*Good*)
7 points in other skills.

Languages:

French-16 (*Great*)
English-16 (*Great*)
German-16 (*Great*)
Spanish-16 (*Great*)

Weapons: Last seen carrying a German submachine gun.

Total: 150 points.

Body 7 Mind 8 Soul 7

Attributes

Flunkies -- 6, Highly Skilled -- 3

Defects

Unique Character Defects:
Overconfident; Skeleton in the Closet
(High-profile assassin)

Skills

Linguistics -- 3, Gun Combat -- 4,
Military Sciences (Leadership) -- 2,

<http://www.britannica.com/bcom/eb/article/2/0,5716,115692+1+108775,00.html?query=vienna>

The Phantom Subway: A Ghostly Adventure for In Nomine



by **Perry M. Lloyd**

This being was formed when a subway train somehow managed to crash into the wall of the subway, killing everyone in the car almost instantly. Though families mourned, and the rest of the world has moved on, the subway car's Ghostly form has not. Rather than resulting from a single mortal's death, this Ghost came into existence from the collective desires of those on the subway train who wished dearly to reach their destination.

The deceased souls pooled their resources, effectively binding their souls together. Thus its Forces total is higher than most ghosts, and its skills include bits and pieces of those who initially formed the collective, and those who've joined since . . . because it possesses the ability to trap inside and assimilate any who board it.

(*In Nomine's* rules for Ghosts are in the *Corporeal Player's Guide*, pp. 80-82)

Corporeal Forces - 5	Strength 12	Agility 9
Ethereal Forces - 4	Intelligence 8	Precision 9
Celestial Forces - 4	Will 10	Perception 8

Skills: Area Knowledge(the city/3, Boston,MA/1, Douglas,AR/1, Duluth,MN/1, Savannah,GA/1), Artistry (Sculpture/1, Drawing/1), Computer Operations/2, Driving/4, Emote/1, Fighting/1, Knowledge (History/1, Biology/1, Baseball History/2, Sports Lore/3, Cultural Studies/1, Art History/1, Business/1), Languages (Spanish/2, English/5), Lying/2, Savoir-Faire/1, Singing/2, Seduction/1

Some Personae on the Train

- Sara, sculpture artist and art history major. She was on her way to the bus station to go back home to visit her boyfriend for the weekend. Attractive, she sits waiting impatiently for her stop.
- Ben, computer programmer. He had finally figured out how to work some code and is looking forward to getting home so he can try it out. He can be seen scribbling furiously in a notebook.
- Mr. Rhodes is the man dressed in the suit and nice coat. He didn't drive this morning because he car wouldn't start. He really wants to get home so that he can watch the rest of the game and see his wife.
- Charlie and his mother, Darla, are looking forward to getting home, too. Charlie so that he can play with his Legos and watch TV, Darla so that she can put her feet up and relax after a long day at the lab.

The Add-Ons

These are victims who haven't been made part of the collective yet.

- Walter, a homeless man who swears up and down that the train is "cursed" and that they, the PCs, have to get out. Of course, after the first time the train crashes, Walter is strangely confused on the topic and doesn't know

what the PCs are talking about if they bring it up to him.

- Steven, a middle-class kid who's listening to his radio and chilling in a back corner on the car. A PC might recognize him or anyone else on the train from Missing Persons posters they may have ever seen, perhaps from years ago.

The GM is, of course, free to modify the skills listed as well as the characters on the subway (perhaps including any NPCs that have disappeared under mysterious circumstances, or otherwise haven't been seen for a while). There should be at least ten people in the train with the PCs, with a suggested maximum of two or three being add-ons.

PC Involvement

One of the easiest ways to involve this being in the game would be to have the player characters board it mistakenly. On the other hand, the PCs might have been specifically sent to help the Ghost to come to rest.

Perhaps a servitor of one of their Superiors is known to have suddenly disappeared in the part of the city near to the train, and the PCs discover him trapped on the train! Perhaps the servitor was able to get word out by falling asleep and journeying through the Marches, but is snapped back awake every time the subway crashes. Alternatively, the characters might have discovered the trapped celestial, or lucid dreamer, or Sorcerer who got the word out this way.

Outcasts or Ethereal spirits might be using the train as refuge from those who seek them -- alternatively boring and traumatic as it might be -- and they need to be set free (if they haven't already joined the collective and are lost to the world).

Act I: Trapped!

Unless the characters immediately start to actively interact with their environment (unlikely if the GM describes the subway casually) they won't realize that anything is out of the ordinary until the subway car suddenly jerks to the side, everyone on board is tossed forward like paper dolls in a breeze, and the PCs die. But then they awaken and get their bearings again, only to find themselves having just entered the train again. (Note that Malakim of War should sense the impending danger before the crash, but even six minutes won't be enough time to stop the train in time even if the PCs *do* figure out what the danger is.) After a second crash, they may realize that they're effectively trapped!

Normally, of course, the PCs could always go celestial and just escape. But on board assuming celestial form either just doesn't work -- perhaps because they've *left* the mortal realm -- or their celestial forms aren't able to move beyond the limits of the train, including returning to their Heart.

The biggest threat the ghostly subway poses: it's able to blind others as to its true nature and slowly draw them into itself. Any new passengers (add-ons) must make a Will roll every time the train crashes. Once they fail a number of rolls equal to their Total Forces, the soul loses a Force and the Ghost gain a characteristic level. Once the soul has lost at least one its Forces to the train, it will defend the train just like the personae, and will have no recollection of anything of the train's odd nature, believing that they're merely on their way to their "destination," dreaming up a false one if need be. Once they've lost all of their Forces to the Ghost, the soul has become a personae of the train, part of the collective soul, and will leave with the train if and when the train is freed from its anchor.

Ghosts don't have a vessel and have no body hits, therefore corporeal damage to the train is effectively meaningless; it cannot be "killed" corporeally, and neither can any of the personae within (though add-ons who haven't completely joined the collected can be, such as Walter and Steven); it can only be damaged Ethereally and Corporeally.

Act II: What's Going On?

The GM knows that the Ghostly Subway is "reliving" the period of time up until the crash, crashing, and then cycling back. The PCs have become part of the cycle, much to their chagrin. The length of each cycle is up to the GM, and is

suggested between forty-five minutes to an hour.

Obviously, the party will have to figure this out on their own. Fortunately, as Celestials, many will have abilities that allow insight into the situation (and it may be fairly obvious to any who are familiar with ghosts).

Angelic Resonances are the most applicable in this regard. The Malakite Resonance can discern that this being's latest dishonorable act was to fail to make it to its destination. A Seraph's resonance might detect that the personae is lying but doesn't realize it when she says that she's going to go see her boyfriend. The Mercurian's resonance immediately detects that this person is dead, and that the person and the train and all other personae in the collective are one being. The EloHITE's resonance might reveal the "true" emotional state of the collective soul, that it's anxiety ridden, and why (death, over and over again). The Lilim resonance could easily discern that this train and all its occupants (since Resonating on one resonates on them all) have the Need to reach their destination safely (or to be freed of its anchor). Any use of Resonances or other information abilities on add-ons will pick up information from that unincorporated rider only.

Soundtrack may prove useful in this regard, too (the soundtrack to *Speed* might be appropriate). Knights of the Dead will automatically know that everyone here died in a wreck and that the wreck is going to occur, again, and when.

If none of these abilities alert the new occupants, perhaps one of the characters picked up a newspaper that has an article on the "anniversary" of the locally famous subway train crash, including the names of the people on the train. Alternatively, the newspaper may have blown in with them as they boarded the subway car, or someone on board could be reading a newspaper with the article within view (they would be an add-on or recent addition to the collective, of course.)

Maybe even all the watches of the passengers read the same, and set to an incorrect time (or even traveling backwards to the time of crash). After a while, the characters might notice that everyone and everything on the train, except themselves, is just slightly translucent. The GM might decide that if the PCs experience "the end of the line" and crash multiple times with the train, that they see that they're also starting to look a little translucent (or, alternatively, the train's starting to look a lot more solid), especially for those who've been failing their Will rolls.

Act III: Escape!

Possible ways to escape include:

- Convince the conductor to stop. Not that it'd be easy, of course, though a Balseraph can convince the train that it's already reached its destination, or that it absolutely must stop. Divine Logic might be useful to convince the conductor. One possible argument would be that there's a problem ahead on the tracks, they're here to fix it and they need to be "let out" to "fix it." The conductor, and all the other personae on the train, is really one being, with Will 10. Roleplaying, of course, should aid the effects of persuasion.
- Reducing its Celestial Forces to 1 through Celestial combat can force the Ghost to let go of its corporeal anchor and go on to its Heavenly (or Hellish) reward. This would require that the GM allow the PCs to assume celestial form (but not allow them to ascend to their heart).
- Breaking a window or forcing an escape hatch open would probably work, but the Ghost will take care of its own. The passengers in the train should leap its defense, trying to pull the characters away from the hatch physically, or verbally convince them to stop. As they all serve as "arms" for the Ghost's strength and agility and are virtually unkillable, they will probably stop the PCs unless they can be somehow distracted or preventing from interfering.

Act IV: Denouement

If the train is stopped for the PCs to make repairs and they escape, or the train is otherwise convinced that its now able to reach its destination, or has been reduced to one celestial force, then the Ghost will be freed from its anchor and the collective soul will move on to be judged. The PCs will be left in the middle of a subway tunnel, which may be

somewhat anticlimatic. The collective soul may so thankful that the PCs receive an artifact from the train and/or its remaining Essence is distributed to the party.

Walter and Steven, along with other add-ons who hadn't lost their souls completely to the Ghost, appear with the PCs, having been "freed." Depending on what Forces they've lost and how many, they may or may not be suitable for recruitment into the War.

Suggested Effects of Other Powers on the Ghostly Subway

Kyriotates/Shedim will be unable to possess the people on the train, Cherubim/Djinn who attune to a persona on the train will realize that the personae and the train are one soul. Calabim who use their Resonance on the train -- or any of the personae within it -- will cause the train to suddenly rock violently and throw them on their face (dealing as much damage as they inflicted).

Habbalah will be happy to discover that the Ghost has a considerably high Will. Lilim can detect the Needs of the train and the add-ons within (the personae and the subway train share needs as a collective).

Elohim of David might realize that they're left normal space/time. Incarnate Law might discern that the local laws (as drawn up by human souls bound up together) involves soul sharing.

Cherubim of Eli will realize that nothing on the train is an item unto itself, but is all part of a "collective entity." Likewise, Transubstantiation will not work. An Ofanite of Fire might recognize that the inhabitants of the train are fleeing from *heavenly* justice (i.e. final judgment).

Swipe will have no effect on anything on the train. Friends of the Unseen will inform the angel that the train itself is watching him. Kyriotates of Jean will be unable to possess anything in the subway train; Remote Control will not work either.

The effects of Call of the Wild shouldn't take until the characters are off the subway. Elohim of the Sword will be able to sense the intense loss, pain, and feelings of failure from within the train. Cherubim of Marc will know that nothing on the train has a true owner, while Mercurians of Marc may be able to learn that no one on the train has earned *any* money for quite a long time. Cherubim of Novalis will notice that they cannot heal the wounds of anyone on the train (the GM might describe one of the personae on the train as having a minor wound, like a cut hand, for this reason).

Seraphim of Yves will note that *everyone's* true name on the train is the same, Cherubim of Yves attempting to attune to someone on the train will learn that s/he's already dead, Mercurians of Yves learn that no one on the train **has** a fortunes in the coming months, and Divine Destiny has no effect, as the train and its passengers are no longer mortal.

Shedim of Beleth will not drive the Ghost mad with their celestial form. Balsraphs and Djinn of Belial will discover that their Band Attunement affects nothing on the train (only the train as a whole).

Djinn of Fate who attune to the train or one of its personae will discover that it's already dead. Impudites of Fate will discover the true nature of the Ghost Subway. Fated Future discovers that the train/personae do not have a great destiny/fate, Temporal Projection will not work, while Knight of the Winged Chariot will discover that time is altered here and that nothing in the train is *really* an object.

Servitors of Malphus will be unable to spark conflict between the personae on the subway. Captains of Swank will receive their +3 reaction bonus from the train and its personae. Calabim of Death should automatically detect that no one in the train is alive; likewise, Vampiric Kiss will have no effect on the train or its personae. Balsraphs of Vapula will discover that nothing on the train is really a device (except those possessions of add-ons). Impudites of Vapula will see with their glasses that the train and the personae within share an Essence pool.

The hard-working Research and Development Team at Uncle Albert's Auto Stop and Gunnery Shop are proud to present three new products just in time for the 2051 Dueling Season!

High Torque Motors



Does your gas-burning neighbor have you suffering from Acceleration Envy? Sure, his car is loud, expensive, and smells like a biker bar, but it's *fast*, right? Fear no more, Uncle Al feels your pain!

Our crack team of engineers has been working overtime to find a way to bring you that same rush of acceleration your neighbors smog-belching machine has, but at a fraction of the cost! Thanks to their success, your efficient electric machine can now keep pace with most of the fossil fuel fanatics.

Or, if you're a *real* speed junkie, try our heavy-duty version instead. It's a little more expensive, but provides a lot more performance

when coupled with your already extra-powerful motor. No longer will you be left at the stoplight choking on exhaust fumes; instead you can stick right with Joe Dino Burner all the way to his maximum, then engage your normal motors and leave him behind!

High Torque Motors (HTM). \$100/wheel, no weight; no space. Compatible only with Electric car or cycle power plants. Limited compatibility with OD, not compatible with HD Transmission. When engaged, the acceleration of the vehicle is increased by 5, and top speed is reduced by 1/4. Engaging or disengaging is a firing action. While HTMs are engaged, the power plant consumes power units at 1.5x the normal rate. If an ISC is triggered while HTMs are engaged, apply the ISC bonus after the HTM bonus. Also, because of the extra stress on the engine from combining these systems, the PP loses 1/2 of its DP due to ISC damage instead of 1/3. A vehicle may mount both HTM and OD, but may never engage both at the same time. Attempting to engage OD or HTM while the other is engaged will trigger safety interlocks that disengage both systems.

Heavy-duty High Torque Motors (HDHTM). \$200/wheel, no weight, no space. May not be combined with HTM. When engaged, base acceleration is DOUBLED, and top speed is reduced by 1/3. While HTMs are engaged, the power plant consumes power units at 2x the normal rate. Identical to HTM in all other respects.)

Metal Airfoils (Improved!)

That metal exterior is the only fire protection your composite-armored machine ever needed—until your expensive plastic spoiler burned away and left you spinning off the road. Until now the expense and weight of a metal version was prohibitive, but Uncle Albert has come through for you again!

Our armor specialists have put together a new blend of metal alloys with an advanced shaping process that gives you the fire protection and durability of metal in your spoilers and airdams, but at a greatly reduced cost and weight. Now metal and composite-armored vehicles can enjoy the handling improvements of an Uncle Albert spoiler or airdam while retaining the full durability and fire resistance that you've come to expect from that thick metal skin!

Metal Spoiler or Airdam. Cost = cost for 10 points of Metal armor; Weight = Weight of 2 points of metal armor; no space. Operation is identical to that of its plastic counterpart, with these exceptions:

- The metal spoiler or airdam becomes ineffective when over half of the original metal armor on the equipped side is destroyed.

- The metal spoiler or airdam is inherently fireproof
- If a vehicle uses composite armor, the spoiler or airdam must match the outer layer armor type.

Cycle Wheel Hubs

Tired of outfitting your cycle with those heavy armored hubcaps that were designed for cars? Uncle Albert would never forget that special group of you who prefer to use fewer than four wheels!

Our special cycle products division has something just for you: A new armored hub that protects just as well as the heavier car version, but is specially designed for your smaller, lighter wheels. Now you can outfit the best tire protection money can buy . . . and still have some weight left over to armor the rest of you!

Cycle Wheel Hubs (CWH). \$10/2lbs per point, maximum of 20lbs per hub. Must match the vehicle's armor type. Mounted instead of Armored Wheel Hubs on any wheel that may use a cycle wheelguard. Protects on a roll of 1-4 on one die, just like an AWH. One CWH protects against damage from one side only. A second CWH must be purchased to protect the other side.

Design Credits

Robert Deis, Mike Fal, Eric Freeman, Rob Hagmaier, Rick Cross

Playtest Credits

The members of Rocky Mountain Autoduel Association, Southern California Autoduellist Brotherhood, Duelling Debate discussion forum.

Pyramid Review

Heaven and Earth RPG Player's Guide

Published by [Guardians of Order](#)



Written by Jeff Mackintosh, John R. Phythyon, Jr.,
Lucien Soulban

128 pages; \$19.95

The long awaited second edition of the Guardians of Order's *Heaven & Earth RPG* has finally come to the market, and *In Nomine* revisited, it isn't.

The core of the setting revolves around the War between Heaven and Hell, with Earth being the battleground, and the collection of Souls being the prize. Unfortunately for us Humans, that's all our Souls really are: prizes to be fought for, and neither Heaven nor Hell are too picky about what they have to do to get us.

The theme of *Heaven & Earth* is that of Horror. Horror not only on an individual or social level, but also on the level of reality: The world is a Dark, Evil place, far more then the news would have you believe, with tales of death and murder hidden behind the white picket fences of suburbia. In this game's background story, the main story arc is the coming of Armageddon, which is unfortunately unlike what is stated in the Bible: once God ends the world, it won't be the Rapture promised, just the End. And Jesus won't be coming back as God's champion, since he's rebelled against this plan and now works independently to save Humanity, even as the world at large remains unaware of its dark fate.

The Game uses the Tri-Stat mechanics (with three basic attributes: Body, Mind, and Soul), making Chapter Two, Character Creation relatively simple for new players, and instinctive for anyone familiar with *BESM* and related games. There are some altered goodies (for example, "Owned by a Corporation" becomes "Sold His/Her Soul"), but otherwise, anyone familiar with Tri-Stat character making should be familiar with the system found therein.

The rest of the Game Mechanics, displayed in Chapter 3, favors a cinematic view of gaming, from the fluid time-keeping to the more open taking of action. Instead of Dice, however, *Heaven & Earth* uses decks of 52 cards (plus Jokers), drawn in threes which make a Hand of Fate: using one, saving a second, and discarding a third. Each of the three Attributes is covered by a Suit which favors it and penalizes others (Body = Spades, Mind = Clubs, Soul = Diamonds), with Hearts being neutral. The Combat system is fairly simple, with additional rules covering firearms, other combat options, and special damage rules as additions.

Chapter Four introduces us to the first Supernatural element of *Heaven & Earth*, the Mules. Mules are ordinary humans who, usually due to contact with the Supernatural, become hosts for powerful spirits which then use their bodies for personal pursuits. In a dark horror game like this, this generally means becoming the vessel of a mass murdering entity, like a horror movie slasher.

Chapter Five introduces the Paranormal, individuals with elaborate psychic gifts, who keep their abilities hidden from the world, due to fear of public panic at their existence as well as fear of the Government's possible actions. There are rules for psychic powers, uncontrollable Wild Talents, and some Drawbacks limited to Paranormal characters.

Chapter Six gives us the game's magic system, based on the Tri-Stat's own default Dynamic Magic system, which favors making freeform magical effects rather than making a default list of spells. This system is somewhat altered by making Mage characters favor a Paradigm, or set of magical beliefs (Such as Wiccanism, Voudoun, or Kabbalism), centered around a Stat for magic use. So mages might favor Physical (Body), Mental (Mind) or Spiritual (Soul) spells.

Magic use in *Heaven & Earth* tends to be very subtle, the working of a magician's will to create seemingly "Coincidental" magical effects, rather than calling upon cosmic energies for Fireballs and the like.

Chapter Seven, Fate and Destiny, expands on the action resolution system of the Hand of Fate by explaining what Fate and Destiny is in *Heaven & Earth*. In this game, Fate is what the Universe places in your path, in seemingly random patterns. Destiny is your character's reason for being, be it to be a saint or a sinner. In game terms, the Hand of Fate card system allows either a GM or a Player to add seemingly random events, benefiting either PCs or NPCs, by drawing and playing Fate Cards, which have different events tied to them.

Chapter Eight, Horror and the Supernatural, works to describe how to roleplay the setting of *Heaven & Earth*, with a lot of emphasis placed on covering the mood of the world, which are: Subtle Horror, Maddening Surrealism, and Dark Absurdity. Supernatural Elements, Dark Conspiracies, and the looming Apocalypse all get mentioned in this chapter, although angels and demons don't get more than a single paragraph's worth of mention.

Finally, Chapter Nine focuses on a little slice of the "Hidden Horror" of the Campaign with the little town of Potter's Lake, one of your typical "Small-Town USA" sized cities, the likes you could find in an old 50s sitcom. This city has a paper mill, an Air Force Base, and more "Something is Wrong" levels of weirdness than should be stuffed into a city that size (such as an entire 4th of July parade disappearing right in the middle of a performance, only showing up skinny dipping at a nearby lake sometime later, without any memories of the event). This chapter is chock full of good plot hooks and adventure seeds, and describes how to make characters to fit this "Twin Peaks" like setting, with some character samples.

Overall, *Heaven & Earth* makes for an interesting, albeit nihilistic roleplaying experience, and might even serve an enterprising GM as a tool for converting a game like *In Nomine* to the Tri-Stat system. As it is, though, the game sorely lacks stats and rules for playing angels and demons (which, for a game called *Heaven & Earth*, is an odd omission). As such, the main book will be most useful for those games focussing mostly on Mules, Paranormals, and Mages. It's worth taking a look, at least.

-- *Rolland Therrien*

Pyramid Pick

War in the Heavens: Hegemony

Published by [Holistic Design Inc.](#)

Written by Bill Bridges



128 pages; \$20.00

War in the Heavens: Hegemony is the second in a planned trilogy of books detailing major alien factions of the *Fading Suns* universe. Consisting of two sections, a sourcebook and a lengthy adventure, *Hegemony* is an excellent addition to the *Fading Suns* line. Indeed, it's one of the best *Fading Suns* books to date. The combination of evocative writing, fascinating ideas, and usability marks it as one of the best roleplaying supplements I've read in a long time.

Hegemony provides both players and GMs with oodles of information about the alien Vau species - their society, culture, and goals - while deftly avoiding a common problem in factional sourcebooks of this kind: "setting escalation." That is, *Hegemony* shows the importance and uniqueness of the Vau to the *Fading Suns* setting without making them the most important element of that setting. It's a tightrope that many supplements fail to walk, and it's a credit to the author that he managed it in this volume.

Physically, the book is up to the high standards of previous *Fading Suns* books. *Hegemony* has an attractive cover showing a suitably mysterious Vau mandarin, as well as excellent interior art. John Bridge's moody art doesn't appear as much as I'd like, but it's supplemented by some first rate work by Mitch Byrd, whose work on White Wolf's *Hunter* line hasn't always appealed to me. The layout of the book and choice of fonts succeeds in combining legibility with atmosphere, which is another tightrope game books of this sort often fail to walk. My only criticism is that there are still too many typos and editorial glitches for a professional game book. It's a minor point, but one that's all the more jarring given the otherwise high quality of *Hegemony*.

Broadly speaking, the book is divided into five parts. The first is the obligatory chapter from "Alustro's Journal," the ongoing saga of a young priest journeying with his companions among the worlds of *Fading Suns*. The latest installment does a good job of conveying the alienness and mystery of the Vau, a race with whom humanity has had only intermittent and puzzling -- contact throughout its history. The journal entry is followed up by a brief introduction that outlines the book and its place in the "War in the Heavens" trilogy.

The second part is entitled "Book One: Inception" and is a subjective account of history and culture of the Vau, as told by a human raised in the Vau Hegemony. It's extremely well done and goes a long way toward making the Vau mindset intelligible to outsiders, while still conveying its otherworldly character. However, if you're not one for in-character descriptions of the game setting, you'll find Book One very annoying. A lot of what the viewpoint character says is untrue or at least inaccurate, which might be frustrating to readers who want the whole truth and nothing but.

That said, Book One discusses Vau history and evolution, including the race's relationship with the fabled Architects -- the ancient race of the *Fading Suns* setting. That information is augmented with details of the Vau's society and culture. Everything from their caste system to language and naming practices is given a solid treatment. There's also plenty of information on the internal politics of the Hegemony and its many alien races (the Vau are not only species in their area of space). Book One strikes a nice balance between too much information and not enough. Reading through it, you get the impression of a genuinely alien culture without being bogged down with pseudo-sociological mumbo-jumbo. It's a good approach and one that conveys depth without drowning the reader in superfluous details.

(SPOILER ALERT!)

The third part of the book is entitled "Book Two: Elabi." It is a massive adventure that takes the characters into the Hegemony to learn firsthand about the Vau and their ways. It also corrects many of the errors and omissions from Book One, but does so through the adventure, which is a very nice. This approach allows the characters to be the agents by which humanity learns more about the Vau and resolves some of its misapprehensions. The adventure assumes the characters were involved in the adventure included in Part One of "War in the Heavens," but contains enough GM advice and options that it's not a necessity. The adventure is extremely well done and engaging. My only complaint - and it's a small one - is that its conclusion makes the characters very important people in the *Fading Suns* setting. They'll have done what no one has done in centuries: set foot upon a world of the Hegemony and plumbed its secrets. Thus, the adventure is epic in its consequences, which some GMs may not find to their tastes.

(END SPOILER ALERT)

Part four of the supplement includes rules for generating Vau and other Hegemony aliens as characters. This is a nice touch and a warranted one. Hegemony provides enough information that I can easily envisage a campaign that takes place entirely within Vau space. Moreover, Holistic Design has promised additional support for this setting, which should warm the hearts of anyone taken in by this book's portrayal of the Vau.

Hegemony concludes with an eight-page report on the Vau that represents humanity's knowledge of the species prior to the events of Book Two. It's a nice summary, and makes a good handout to give to players before the game. A PDF version is available on Holistic Design's website - another nice touch that made me quite happy.

All in all, *War in the Heavens: Hegemony* represents another example of why *Fading Suns* is an under-appreciated gem of a game. The supplement is well conceived and detailed without hampering a GM's ability to include the information into an ongoing campaign. More significantly, it shows yet again how to produce a dynamic setting with plenty of mysteries and enigmas without locking a campaign into a set story arc or metaplot. It's a nice little trick and one that I'd love to see other game companies emulate. In addition, the Vau are a genuinely interesting alien race, with lots of potential for spurring space operatic adventures among the *Fading Suns*. Fans of both *Fading Suns* and good game design owe to themselves to give this book a look.

--James Maliszewski

Pyramid Review

The Unspeakable Oath 16/17

Published by Pagan Publishing



Edited by Brian Appleton, John H. Crowe III, Adam Scott Glancy & John Tynes

Art by John Coulthart et al

\$16

The Unspeakable Oath is Pagan Publishing's magazine devoted to Chaosium's *Call of Cthulhu* game, and the latest issue has just been released. Unfortunately it has been a long wait for issue 16/17 . . . some four years since the previous issue (14/15) was released back in 1997. Pagan Publishing is not a company that likes to publish in a rush, and instead tends to release a book once they have it right. In the long hiatus, have they got it right with this issue?

As with all of their books, *UO 16/17* is attractive to look at. John Coulthart's full wraparound cover is equally eye-catching and disturbing, and not necessarily something you want to be seen in public with. Inside, John Tynes' layout is very clear and simple after the graphical complexities of the previous issue. Throughout, the use of both artwork and photographs is suitably appropriate.

Besides three new mysterious manuscripts, this issue has a strong bibliophilic bent. John Goodrich's "That Horrid Book" discusses the possible side effects of reading Mythos tomes, with a focus upon the *Necronomicon* itself. This aside, these are very good suggestions and should set any good Keeper thinking about possible side effects of reading other books. In "Lesser Evils," Brian M. Sammons introduces a number of new tomes and published chapters from actual tomes, all of which have been taken from published Cthulhu Mythos stories. These do not just include tales by Lovecraft and Derleth, but also Brian Lumley, Lin Carter, Robert Bloch and Henry Kuttner. The intention with these lesser tomes is to place them in an ongoing campaign to help maintain the mystique and power of the greater, better known books such the *Necronomicon* or the *Cultes De Ghouls*.

Considering that New England is the prime setting for both Mythos fiction and *Call of Cthulhu*, it is surprising that its major city Boston has not been explored anywhere before. Guy Bock rectifies this with an article on the Boston of the thirties. This is accompanied by a chronology of the city, which includes the details of the Lovecraft stories that take place in (or are in some way connected to) the city. It would have been nice to also have a list of the *Call of Cthulhu* scenarios that are likewise set in or connected to Boston. Guy Bock's second article examines technology and science of the twenties and thirties; it lists selected technological inventions and scientific discoveries, and examines them in detail. Not just everyday items are described -- such as the elevator, electric light and phonograph -- but also gear that an investigator might want to use. The stance on the technology is not just when it was invented, but when it entered widespread use, so if a Keeper wants to know when the players can get hold of dynamite or a Geiger counter, then this will prove useful.

Not quite so immediately useful are the two articles on India. The first is "The Deceivers" by David Perry and A. Scott Glancy, which is an examination of the secret cult of Thuggee, followed by "Dhanurvedya, Varman and Avarna," Michael J. Varhola's article on the arms and armor of the sub-continent. That India has been little used in *Call of Cthulhu* is a shame, as it offers plenty of opportunities as game setting. Both of these articles go far in redressing the balance, but unfortunately neither is made use of in this issue of *UO*. It would have been nice to see an adventure included using this material. Without it, these articles only have real use in historical scenarios or even as the

background for Dreamlands-set adventures.

The two adventures in the book break with the graphic simplicity of the rest of the magazine. "Punitive Measures" by Brian Appleton is laid in the same style as Pagan Publishing's *Mortal Coils* anthology, while Adam Gauntlet's *Delta Green* scenario, "See No Evil," is done as a *Delta Green* book. "Punitive Measures" is a one-shot scenario set in 1916, during General Pershing's campaign in Mexico against Pancho Villa. The players are US Army troopers assigned to follow up on a raid upon a village by some of Pancho Villa's men. In doing so, they stumble upon the potentially very bloody Mythos situation. The finale of the adventure is very strongly combat-oriented, and with either the pre-generated provided or new characters this encounter could be the reason why the investigators now fight Mythos forces. There is only slight room for including non-military characters in this adventure, and almost none for including female characters.

"See No Evil" is a low-key scenario for Delta Green as the players are ordered to piggyback an FBI surveillance operation upon a group that adheres to the theory of Holocaust Denial. Not only do the investigators have to conduct this surveillance in a legal manner, but hide their illegal activities and methods from the ordinary FBI team members. Set in New York, this could easily be slotted into part of an Unseen Masters campaign if that is being run for Delta Green. This is a good scenario, which has the potential to explode into combat at the end. It does come with play test notes, but the writing feels a little rushed in places.

The Unspeakable Oath 16/17 is rounded out with a letters page and a reviews section. The latter covers games, books, and films in some depth. It does show its age in coverage of the games, although the reviews of Steve Jackson Games' *GURPS Warehouse 23* and *Black Ops*, as well as *In Nomine* are rather favorable.

Although *The Unspeakable Oath* has been on a four-year hiatus, it has been worth the wait. This is mainly due to the quality of the contents, which, while perhaps not comparable to that found in previous issues, is still worth reading. The issue might have been seemed better if we didn't have to wait quite so long, but we can only hope that it isn't another four years until the next issue.

-- Matthew Pook

Who Was That Masked Man, He Asked Ironically

"Some months after the death of [Mazarin], an event without parallel occurred, and what is no less strange is that all historians are unaware of it. An unknown prisoner, of height above the ordinary, young and of an extremely handsome and noble appearance, was conveyed with the utmost secrecy to the castle on the island of Sainte-Marguerite in the sea off Provence. On the way there, the prisoner wore a mask, the chin-piece of which had steel springs to allow him to eat with it on, and the order was to kill him if he took it off . . . This unknown man died in 1703, and was buried at night in the parish church of St. Paul . . . What is doubly astonishing is that when he was conveyed to Sainte-Marguerite, no man of consequence in Europe disappeared . . . it is clear that it was a prisoner of the greatest importance whose destiny had always been a secret."

-- Voltaire, *The Age of Louis XIV* (1752)

The story of the Man in the Iron Mask first appeared in print when that cunning propagandist Voltaire painted it into his *Age of Louis XIV* (which he, no idiot, had printed in Berlin). He, Voltaire, having done time in the Bastille (admittedly fifteen years after) had heard of the "noble prisoner," the sole charge of the head of the Bastille, former Musketeer Benigne d'Auvergne de Saint-Mars. And now, discreetly, he blew the gaff: Saint-Mars had escorted a noble prisoner from prison to prison over a space of forty years, always keeping the man's face masked. In an age before television and *People* magazine, there were very few people whose face was so recognizable that such a mask could have been needed -- except, of course, the King, whose face was on every coin and note. Voltaire dropped enough hints to make sure even the dimmest *philosophe* understood -- the Man in the Iron Mask was the twin brother of Louis XIV, concealed to conceal Louis' inferior (moral, or sometimes even chronological) claim to the throne.

It's important to note, here, that Voltaire exaggerated the hell out of the prisoner's "nobility", but no more than roughly contemporary rumor did -- there was a masked (albeit in black velvet) prisoner in the Bastille, who died on November 19, 1703. The documentary chain of evidence makes it almost certain that this Man in the Velvet Mask was a single prisoner who had followed the jailer Saint-Mars from prison to prison, starting out at the Alpine fortress of Pignerol on August 24, 1669. At least once, we have a dated, contemporary (albeit still second-hand) reference to the prisoner being made to wear an iron mask. But we stray dangerously toward history here, so as a corrective, we'll note that Alexandre Dumas played his customary ducks and drakes with the story, including a scene in which the entire Paris court sees the twins meet -- which would tend to make masking the twin to conceal his existence rather pointless, I'd think. But anyway, the last part of Dumas' *Viscount of Bragelonne*, sometimes excised as *The Man in the Iron Mask*, is a corking good story, which is all we need.

"And they saw, by the red flashes of lightning against the violet fog which the wind stamped upon the bank-ward sky, they saw pass gravely, at six paces behind the governor, a man clothed in black and masked by a vizor of polished steel, soldered to a helmet of the same nature, which altogether enveloped the whole of his head . . . 'Call me neither monsieur nor monseigneur,' said the prisoner in his turn, in a voice that penetrated to the very soul of Raoul; 'call me Accursed!' He passed on, and the iron door croaked after him."

-- Alexandre Dumas pere, *The Viscount of Bragelonne*,

And corking good stories abound. In addition to Louis XIV's secret twin brother, some have proposed Louis XIV's secret older half-brother (the illegitimate offspring of his mother Anne of Austria and the Duke of Buckingham being the most popular candidate), a secret older sister (the mask being necessary to disguise her female features), his secret father (Louis XIII not having been up to the task) masked to conceal his resemblance to his son Louis, and his (real) illegitimate son, the Comte de Vermandois. Unfortunately, Vermandois died on the battlefield in 1683, by which time, the Man in the Iron Mask had been imprisoned for 14 years. Nothing loth, the Vermandois patrons argue that the first prisoner was a "placeholder" kept masked so that someone famous could be secretly imprisoned after a faked death.

Thus, for our purposes, absolutely anyone who died between 1669 and 1703 could "actually" have been spirited away to prison and masked, which opens the field marvelously: my favorite version has the Duke of Monmouth, who attempted to overthrow James II in 1685, being swapped in for the Iron Mask and a lookalike executed in London. (Contemporary rumor did, in fact, identify the Iron Mask as an "English milord.") Richard Cromwell (son of Oliver),

who died in England in 1712, is another candidate put forward based on contemporary rumor and a properly cavalier disregard for chronology; in this context it's kind of disappointing to report that the Grand Admiral of France, the Duc de Beaufort, is often placed in the Iron Mask based on his disappearance in 1669 during the French attack on Crete.

"I see," said Aramis, with a most engaging smile; 'it is written that our dear d'Artagnan shall know all our secrets this evening. Yes, my friend, you have surely heard speak of M. Fouquet's Epicureans, have you not?' 'Undoubtedly. Is it not a kind of poetical society, of which La Fontaine, Loret, Pélisson, and Moliere are members, and which holds its sittings at St. Mandé?' 'Exactly so. Well, we are going to put our poets in uniform, and enroll them in the service of the King.'"

-- Alexandre Dumas pere, *The Viscount of Bragelonne*

It's far more refreshing to dive into the theory that the Man in the Iron Mask was, in fact, the father of the French Theater, Moliere! Moliere's play *Tartuffe* had offended the powerful Compagnie du Saint-Sacrament, a secret society of creepy ultramontanist Catholics (who, for example, opposed both Mazarin and the Jesuits) "officially" disbanded by Louis XIV in 1660. However, from the shadows, they struck -- kidnapping Moliere after Moliere had "died" onstage (in a performance of *The Imaginary Invalid* in 1673) and bustling him off to Pignerol in a mask. (The mask, of course, to conceal Moliere's very famous actor's face, and the instruction against speaking to conceal his equally famous actor's voice.) This theory, delightfully, has the near-complete absence of hard documentary evidence regarding Moliere's life going for it -- he left little more behind him than Shakespeare did -- which implies that the Compagnie cleared out his rooms after doing the deed.

"You must make sure the windows are so placed that they do not give on to anywhere accessible to anyone, and that there are enough doors closing one upon the other that the sentries will not be able to hear anything. You personally must take the wretch whatever he needs for the day once a day, and you must never listen to anything he tries to tell you, whatever the pretext may be. You must threaten to kill him if he ever opens his mouth to speak to you about anything save the bare necessities of his life."

-- letter from the Marquis de Louvois to Saint-Mars, July 19, 1669

Sadly, after sifting the archives (which unkindly list every prisoner at Pignerol), there are really only two real candidates worth mentioning. The first is one Ercole Mattioli, secretary of state to the Duke of Mantua. Mattioli double-crossed the French in a complex intrigue, and was clapped into Pignerol in 1679 with orders from Louis XIV that "no one should know what becomes of this man." The masked prisoner of the Bastille, it turns out, was buried under the name "Marchiolly," and the King's Lieutenant in the Bastille referred to the masked man as "M. Marchiel" -- all significant pointers. The other candidate is one Eustache Danger (or Dager, or D'Angers), a "mere valet" arrested at Dunkirk in 1669 and clapped into durance vile for still-murky causes. John Noone, in his meticulous and intelligent *The Man Behind the Iron Mask*, makes a compelling case for Danger over Mattioli, but falls down on the question of Danger's crime. (As far as the mask goes, Noone describes it as a deliberate attempt at mystification and self-aggrandizement by Saint-Mars.)

One fascinating possibility is one Eutache d'Auger de Cavoye, a childhood playmate of Louis XIV, who was involved in a Black Mass in 1659 -- and eventually implicated as a poisoner, Satanist, and sorcerer in the "La Voisin ring" that included the King's mistress Montespan. The authorities had quashed and covered up one branch of La Voisin's organization in 1668 -- including, according to surviving records of interrogations, a "surgeon" (possible code for an abortionist-poisoner) named "Auger" -- who lived at d'Auger's address! The Satanist in the Iron Mask has a cool ring, eh? Some writers try for the trifecta by assuming that d'Auger's father, Francois d'Auger, captain of the Cardinal's Guard, might have been the "stud" who impregnated Anne of Austria -- and thus d'Auger had to be masked to conceal his resemblance to Louis XIV. Annoyingly, it's likely that d'Auger de Cavoye (who may, still, have been "Auger") died in the asylum of Saint-Lazare in 1688ish.

"Monsieur de Cinq-Mars [sic] has by order of the King transported a state prisoner from Pignerol to the island of Sainte-Marguerite. No-one knows who he is, there is an interdiction on speaking his name and an order to kill him if he should pronounce it . . . He was enclosed in a sedan-chair with a steel mask on his face, and all that one could learn from Cinq-Mars is that this prisoner was at Pignerol for many years, and that all the people one believes to be dead are not."

-- unsigned letter, possibly from the Bishop of Agde, Sep 4, 1687

Intriguingly, there's at least a smidgen of evidence that d'Auger (unsuccessfully) poisoned Louis XIV's minister of finance, Nicolas Fouquet -- who, in fact, received the Man in the Iron Mask as a valet while doing time in Pignerol. Fouquet's arrest has always seemed dodgy -- he was a prominent member of the Compagnie du Saint-Sacrament, by the way -- and there are those who, in defiance of his well-documented death in 1680, make Fouquet out to be the Man in the Iron Mask after some creative body-switching. Fouquet is also at the hub of the whole *Prieuré de Sion* thing, and the Man in the Iron Mask might have been the true Merovingian heir, the Duc de Guise. This theory holds that Louis XIV faked Guise's death in 1664, but secretly imprisoned him to paralyze the *Prieuré* -- with the True King still alive, they couldn't begin conspiring to put the next Merovingian heir on the throne. Similar threads run through the notion that either the illegitimate son of the (Merovingian) Charles II Stuart, or Charles II himself (swapped for a pliable double during his exile in France) was the Masked Prisoner.

"No fable however far-fetched, no grouping of characters however improbable, can, however, destroy the interest which the innumerable writings about the Iron Mask excite, although no two agree in details, and although each author and each witness declares himself in possession of complete knowledge."

-- Alexandre Dumas pere, "The Man In The Iron Mask"

This should illustrate the possibilities for the Man In The Iron Mask -- in a triumph of bisociative Maskerade, anyone or anything might be behind that black velvet domino. Perhaps the Man in the Iron Mask was a superhero, a 17th-century Unknown Soldier, who hid his "secret identity" in the comfortable prison of Sainte-Marguerite, and only emerged when la Belle France needed him most to impersonate someone. Was the Iron Mask in fact the Templar [Baphomet](#), placed on the faces of political prisoners to draw out their knowledge or feed on their souls? Maybe the Iron Mask was the Man's actual face, hidden behind a black velvet hood -- could he have been a clockwork cyborg? Could he have been the [Comte de Saint-Germain](#), or the [Wandering Jew](#), masked to conceal the fact that he did not age? Did the mask conceal the scales of a Reptoid, or protect France from the deadly charismatic nimbus of an [Enochian Nephilim](#)? "All the people one believes to be dead are not." And some aren't even people. Unmask, and enjoy.

Murphy's Rules



by John Kovalic

Murphy's Rules



Murphy's Rules



Trickery! Trickery!

One of the biggest difficulties I've had when GMing has been sneaking in information.

Because players are inherently paranoid, and they listen to *everything*. Oh, sure, they may spend hours running after some red herring or another, but it's worth it to catch the GM flat-footed, scrambling to repair the shambles of the adventure.

Let me give an example.

Our GM was running an *In Nomine* adventure where we needed to figure out what was going on in this house; we suspected something was manipulating the members of the family to hate each other. As we approach the home, she describes the scene, and mentions (amid a couple other details) that there is a dog barking at us.

We players just looked at each other. And in each others' eyes we could see *Terminator*-esque targeting HUDs zeroing in.

"DOG" = "ENEMY"

"I look at the dog using my special investigative power."

"I examine the dog with my gift of knowing the virtue or vice of its soul."

"I load."

And peering over the screen, shifting through notes and rolling dice, our GM said:

"Damn you."

Like accidentally showing the last five minutes of a *Twilight Zone* first, the adventure was clearly veering off into territory our poor GM wasn't expecting, and she scrambled to adjust.

She ended up doing a fine job under pressure, and I believe she quickly realized that knowing who The Bad Guy is and being able to do something about it are two very different concepts. ("Why are you beating my dog to death with a bat?" "Because we're trying to help your family, Billy . . . and we didn't want to wake you up by using the rifle. Good night.")

But I can't help but consider that she might have had an easier time if she hadn't revealed too much too soon. On the other hand, you *need* to include that information; otherwise if she had just introduced the dog in the last ten minutes of the adventure, we would have been wildly disappointed. ("Ha-ha! They had a dog you didn't know about, and it was behind the whole thing!") Bad mysteries have this problem, where the "solution" is completely unknowable until the writer chooses to reveal it to you. I remember one soap opera I saw where they hadn't revealed that the cottage where the murder occurred was on the edge of a cliff . . . a cliff that figured prominently into the solution.

Here, then, are some techniques I've used in the past to obscure the truth, while still making the clues available and keeping the whole experience satisfying.

- *Give the shadows of the clue, not the clue itself.* It can often work wonders if you can give a glimpse of the Clue, without giving the clue itself. If our GM had mentioned the baying of a dog in the background as our car approached, we may well not have noticed. Even if we had, we would have needed to *find* the dog to further that avenue of investigation.

Consider an adventure where the regular batteries in a radio have been replaced with a bomb; the next time the radio is played it will explode. Instead of giving access to the radio, telling the players it's a bit heavier than normal or doesn't feel right, let them find the replaced batteries. Now they may know there's something going on

. . . and it has something to do with batteries . . . but they don't have direct access to the device (yet).

- *Obstruct clues with clues.* A mean trick is to hide an important clue with another clue (perhaps one of lesser importance). In the *In Nomine* game, for example, our GM could have said something like, "As you approach the driveway you notice tire marks and paw prints, probably belonging to a dog. You're able to tell that the car pulled out recently, because the tire marks are fresh, and cover the paw prints." In that way she could have hidden the existence of the dog with another clue (a clue which, ideally, would continue the adventure in a way she wanted).
- *Cover clues with gamespeak.* Since roleplaying games are often about rules, it's easy to sneak in information wrapped inside rules. In my original *GURPS Supers* game I ran, for example, I had a subplot where the gadgeteer scientist character was being possessed by an entity that was controlling him at night to create a giant device that would be used against the heroes. So I pulled that player aside and told him, "You've been working long days trying to complete the repairs on the vehicle that was damaged in the last adventure; you're going to be at -1 to observation and reaction rolls until you can get a decent night's sleep." In that way I was able to sneak in the clue that he hasn't been sleeping right, while not making him overly paranoid.

Likewise in our dog example our GM might have said, "Between the dog house in the yard and the watering dish on the porch you can tell there's a dog around here. If you sneak around to the house let me know; you're at -2 to all sneak attempts." Or something else. Make up penalties (or bonuses) to sneak in information.

- *Put the characters on the defensive.* Another way to keep the players on their toes is to make the characters reactive; if they're too busy worrying, they're less likely to notice the true significance of the clue. In the dog example we might have been taken aback if our GM said, "You see what looks like the family dog here, eyeing you suspiciously and sniffing the air. Does either of your characters wear cologne? Deodorant? What are your initiatives?" By making the players react they have less time to do anything else.

(As an aside, I've always wanted to run a cyberpunk/*Shadowrun*-style adventure where the heroes need to sneak into a building for a mission, they take the elevator up to some floor, accomplish some goal, and leave the building. There would be no complications. Then once they're dividing up the loot, I'd ask the party, "Oh, by the way . . . when you got on the elevator, who pushed the button?" I'm guessing the players would devolve into a raging argument over who pushed the button.)

Perhaps most importantly, be prepared to *let* your players understand the clues. If you wanted to make sure your players absolutely couldn't figure out your ultra-kewl mystery, you wouldn't invite them to play. But by obstructing the truth, and making your players really think, it'll make the times they *do* figure out the clues that much more satisfying.

--Steven Marsh

* * *

Last week's answer: GURPS Space, all three editions (look up "Amoeba, giant space" in the index).

(Five stars) "The game begins in June 1941 with huge Axis armies poised on the borders of the Soviet Union, ready to annihilate the ill-prepared Russian forces guarding the frontiers. As in the actual event, the game accurately portrays the devastating Axis blitzkrieg which swallowed whole Russian armies in the summer of 1941."



by **James L. Cambias**

The Mayan Empire in our own timeline was destroyed during the Spanish conquest of the New World. In the universe of *GURPS Castle Falkenstein*, the Maya were better able to resist the European onslaught, and their kingdom has survived into the Age of Steam as a unique realm of strange customs, powerful magic, and curious "windpunk" technology.

Geography

The Mayan Empire occupies the entire Yucatan peninsula, and extends south to the Cuchumatanes mountains. It borders Mexico on the west, the Republic of Hidalgo to the south, and the Republic of Honduras to the east.

The terrain of the Yucatan is flat. There are no rivers in the northern part of the peninsula, because all the water flows through underground channels and caverns in the porous limestone rock. Here and there natural sinkholes, called *cenotes*, give access to the water from the surface. Mayan cities grew up around the cenotes, and the Maya became experts at constructing reservoirs and irrigation systems to spread the water.

In the south, the terrain becomes more hilly. The valley of the Usumacinta river cuts through the southern highlands, and is the breadbasket of the Maya. Beyond the river the land rises to the heights of the Cuchumatanes range. The mountains hold veins of copper, gold and silver.

The east coast of the Yucatan is low and swampy, covered by heavy jungle. In the south, there are two large rivers, the Motagua and the Poichic, which flow into the Gulf of Honduras. The jungles are inhabited by Indians related to the Maya, and serve as a buffer between the Empire and the republics of Latin America.

The population of the Mayan Empire is a million and a quarter . . . much larger than any of the other Latin American states except Mexico. Most of the people live either at the northern end of the Yucatan peninsula, in the central hills, or in the Usumacinta valley in the south. The eastern part of the Empire is nearly empty.

Cities

The capital city of the empire is Mayapan, with a population of about 100,000. Mayapan is by far the biggest city; other cities have populations of 20,000 to 30,000. Important cities of the Empire include Chichen Itza, Tikal, Palenque, Uxmal, Sayil, Kabah, and Yaxchilan.

Mayapan is an impressive city. Most of its great buildings were built in the past two centuries, and there is a detectable Spanish influence, particularly in the use of the arch, which was unknown in Mayan architecture before 1492. It is not, however, a frequently-visited place. There are only three hotels, but they are quite large and comfortable. The hotels are practically the only places in the whole country where one can find a bed; the Maya prefer to sleep in hammocks.

Sisal is the chief port of the Mayan Empire, and lies on the northern coast of the Yucatan Peninsula. The area around Sisal is mostly farmland, devoted to the production of hemp. The harbor cannot accommodate large modern steamships, so everything must be brought ashore in small boats. Sisal itself is an unimpressive town; the real metropolis of the region is the city of Dzibilchaltun, about 20 miles away. Sisal is connected with Dzibilchaltun by a remarkable wind-powered railway, and plans are afoot to extend the lines all over the country.

History of the Maya

The ancestors of the Maya entered the Yucatan from Mexico thousands of years ago. Their great civilization developed around A.D. 300, when the first large cities were built. Mayan chronicles of the early period are filled with myth and legend, and it is difficult to tell what really happened.

For example, tradition holds that the city of Uxmal was built in three days by a dwarf magician. Some modern Dwarfs claim this must have been one of their race, exhibiting the legendary craftsmanship for which they are still known. But the fact that the dwarf is described as a magician tends to contradict that theory, and the truth may never be known. Was it perhaps a midget human who was a powerful sorcerer? Or possibly an actual dwarf who somehow retained magical Talent? Or is the whole story just a legend?

The various city-states flourished during the next few centuries, fighting wars with their neighbors and building impressive monuments which still may be seen today. At its height the Mayan civilization extended much further south, encompassing the modern Republic of Hidalgo and the western half of Honduras.

During the Tenth Century, the Maya fell into a decline, and the region was conquered by Toltec followers of Quetzalcoatl who had been driven from Mexico by the invading Aztecs. They established themselves as a ruling class and helped to revitalize the Maya. The Toltecs established their capital at Chichen, and conquered all the surrounding states. Their kingdom flourished for two hundred years before a terrible plague ravaged the entire empire and left the capital depopulated.

Into this power vacuum came a second band of invaders, the Itza. They arrived in 1224 and crossed the thinly-populated center of the peninsula to settle on the east coast, then moved north to occupy the old capital city, which became known as Chichen-Itza. A generation later the Itza founded the city of Mayapan, and forced the other Mayan cities into a unified kingdom in 1283.

Initially the Itza were nothing but rapacious conquerors. Their new capital was stuffed with loot from the other Mayan cities, and the Itza constantly fought wars to gain new booty and slaves. But over the centuries the Maya conquered their conquerors and civilized them.

In 1461, the ruler of the Mayan Empire was Hunac Ceel, a great sorcerer and a thoughtful ruler. His magic brought him premonitions of disaster, and eventually Hunac offered to throw himself into the Sacred Cenote at Chichen Itza in exchange for a prophecy of the future. Attired in elaborate regalia, Hunac jumped. Unlike previous sacrifices, he came out again. The Rain Gods had given him two visions of the future.

In one, the Maya rebelled against the Itza tyranny, the Empire dissolved into civil war, and was conquered by invaders from over the sea. In the second, the Itza accepted their Maya subjects as partners, developed a prosperous nation of traders and farmers, and united to repel the invaders.

It took all of Hunac Ceel's authority and sorcery to convince the nobles of the Empire. He inaugurated great reforms, and allied himself with the old Maya nobles against the other Itza. Hunac died, worn out by his efforts, in 1494, just as word came from traders in Cuba that strangers had arrived from across the sea.

The first Spanish attempt to conquer the Yucatan came in 1527, when Don Francisco de Montejo landed on the island of Cozumel, then crossed to the mainland. Surprisingly swift and organized resistance drove him back to the island, where the Conquistadores looted and demolished the great Temple of Ix Chel. A decade later, Montejo's son made a landing near Campeche, and penetrated as far as the city of Ake before his force was cut off and destroyed.

The Spanish made three other attempts at conquest: a landing near Sisal in 1544, an invasion from Mexico in 1588, and a disastrous attack from Honduras in 1601. Finally in 1617 the Spanish and Maya signed the Treaty of Cozumel, in which the Spanish agreed to end their attacks in exchange for three conditions: that Mayan ports be closed to all but Spanish ships, that missionaries be allowed into the Mayan Empire, and that the Maya make no alliances with Spain's enemies. The treaty was effectively an admission by the Spanish that they couldn't conquer the Mayan Empire, since the Maya had no desire to trade or negotiate with other New Europeans anyway.

Mayan Society and Culture

The Mayan state makes a great effort to remain entirely self-sufficient. Instead of importing foreign goods, the Maya either make things for themselves or do without. A shortage of iron on the peninsula means the Maya have become experts at working stone and making tough ceramics as substitutes. Soldiers in the Mayan army use bullets of baked clay rather than lead.

That being said, the Maya actually do trade quite a bit with their neighbors, particularly the Latin American republics to the south. The Empire's leading export is cotton cloth, dyed in bright colors and woven in intricate patterns. Chocolate is another export, as is salt from the evaporation beds near Campeche. Merchants and traders are generally devotees of Ek Chuah, the Black God. The majority of Mayan seafarers are members of the Chontal tribe. They are excellent seafarers, roving the Gulf and the Caribbean. Much of the Empire's freight moves by water, and several Chontal-owned shipping lines sail to Mexican, Cuban and Texican ports.

Mayan money is based on the gold standard. The coins are minted bearing the image of a cocoa bean. Cocoa was legal tender among the Maya until the early 18th century. Even today, the word for money and the word for chocolate are the same. Merchants in the major cities will freely accept foreign gold and silver coins, but one can exchange paper money only with great difficulty. The Spanish-Jewish Levi family have operated a bank in Sisal for generations, which handles most foreign exchange.

The backbone of the Mayan economy is corn. More varieties of corn are grown within the Empire than in the rest of the world combined. Mayan farmers also raise beans, peppers, squash, tomatoes, coffee and chocolate. Surprisingly, tobacco is not common in the Empire, nor do the Maya smoke or chew. They are, however, addicted to drinking cocoa, which they brew as strong and black as coffee.

A great gift of the Spanish invasion was the introduction of meat animals. Before the Spanish, the chief source of meat among the Maya was dog, and the occasional small deer. Now they raise cattle in the dry central part of the peninsula, and pigs and chickens everywhere. Oxen and mules are widely used as plow animals on Mayan farms. Horses are uncommon, as the Maya remain awkward horsemen.

All the Maya wear nothing but cotton. They favor sleeveless tunics. The men in the cities and port towns wear European-style trousers, but inland they make do with simple kilts. Despite the hot climate, the Maya are intensely modest; even when out working in the fields they are properly dressed. Shoes, however, are almost unknown. Even the most "Europeanized" dandies of Sisal would never dare to wear something as sissified as a shoe.

All travelers in the Mayan Empire have remarked on the great degree of politeness of the inhabitants, and their serious and restrained demeanor. They are much like stereotypical New England Yankees . . . laconic, a bit pessimistic, but kindly and hospitable.

Each Mayan has two names plus a given name. One surname is matrilineal, passed along the female line of descent; the other is patrilineal, from the father's line. The father's name determines clan affiliation, which is quite important.

One thing which can make the Maya lose all self-restraint is the ball game. This violent team sport is a mainstay of Mayan society. It is played by teams of men wearing heavy stone belts and little else. The game uses a solid rubber ball weighing about twenty pounds. Players can strike it only with their bodies and knees, and score goals by directing the ball through a stone ring. At sacred festivals the winners of the game are selected as sacrificial victims; more

commonly it is played for fun and entertainment. Professional ball-players occasionally become rich enough to retire . . . if they survive the injuries sustained during play.

Government of the Mayan Empire

The Mayan Empire is not really an empire at all but a federation of 26 city-states, each with its own hereditary king, or *Halach Uinic*. Before Hunac Ceel's reforms, the more powerful cities dominated their weaker neighbors. Nowadays, the states are all equals, and the ruler of each city-state sends a representative to a council in Mayapan, called the Popol. The position of Emperor is hereditary; the current Aac ("Turtle") dynasty have ruled since 1750.

The Emperor has control over the army and foreign affairs, and can regulate trade within the Empire and abroad. His chief sources of revenue are customs duties and the annual tribute from the cities. The Emperor is also the ruler of Mayapan. His official title is *Ah Pop* . . . "him of the mat," which refers to the ceremonial mat upon which the Emperor sits.

The Popol council votes annually to set the tribute, which is paid by the cities in proportion to their population. The nobles of the council can advise the Emperor on policy, but cannot make laws. All positions in government are limited to the noble class, known as *Almehen* ("persons of known descent").

Otherwise, all government is at the local level. The king of each city makes his own laws and sets his own taxes, with the aid of a council of local nobles. A few cities have their own distinctive governments. Chetumal, over on the east coast, has a democratic assembly much like the system of the ancient Greeks, in which all citizens vote on legislation. Huaymil, on the northwest, has an elected city council, and Chichen Itza is administered by the chief priest of the Rain God.

The ruling class of the Empire are descendants of Itza and Toltecs who conquered the Maya at about the same time the Normans invaded England. Like the Normans, they have become completely assimilated. Careful observers may be able to spot the more Mexican features of the upper classes, and often the rulers have Itza personal and family names.

The Royal Family

The current Mayan Emperor is Yax U Aac ("Green Moon Turtle"), who has been on the throne since 1835. He is the first Mayan ruler to take a foreign wife. The Empress Christiana is a princess of the Swedish royal house. She met the Emperor Yax during his tour of New Europa in 1842, and the two were married a year later. They have five children.

Yax U Aac

Yax U Aac has ruled the Maya since he was only nineteen, and has generally done a good job of it. He has tried to end the traditional isolation of the Mayan Empire by encouraging trade and contact with the nations of America, Antillea and New Europa. The Emperor's tour of New European capitals in 1842 was the first time a Mayan ruler ever left the country. Emperor Yax is fluent in Spanish, English, French and German.

One reason for the Emperor's interest in the outside world is his great love for science. He is a dedicated naturalist during his scarce free time, and has corresponded with Darwin and Huxley. Yax U Aac is also a skilled sorcerer, trained in all the magical traditions of the Maya.

Now in his late seventies, the Emperor Yax is starting to show his age, but is hoping to stay on the throne long enough for his son to gain some responsibility. He is a small man, who sometimes seems to have difficulty carrying the elaborate regalia of his office.

Christiana

The Empress Christiana's life has not been easy. She scandalized her family by agreeing to marry the Mayan Emperor, and since then has lived with the disapproval of many Maya aristocrats. Getting used to the customs of the Mayan court was very difficult, but she is a woman of great courage and determination.

Christiana is now in her fifties, but remains a great beauty. She is tall and fair and dresses in traditional Mayan clothing. The Empress is devoted to her husband and children. Lately she has been the mediator between the Emperor and his eldest son.

Tochtli Bernadotte Aac

Prince Tochtli ("rabbit") is something of a disappointment to his father. The prince is tall, strong and handsome, but is careless and easily manipulated by others. He is an Eagle Knight of the Mayan army, and commands a regiment, but spends nearly all his time playing the ball game or drinking. The Prince has not yet married . . . another source of anxiety for his parents . . . but is notorious for his romantic affairs.

Tochtli has been trained in magic by some of the Mayan Empire's greatest sorcerers, and is a superb ball-player. But he has no interest in the arts of government. The Prince is thirty years old, but rough living and heavy drinking make him look older.

The Mayan Army

Ever since the first Spanish invasions, the Maya have kept a standing army, with universal military service required for all men. During the 18th Century a French exile instructed the Maya in modern forms of military organization and doctrine.

The Mayan army is controlled by three warrior orders, the Eagle Knights, Jaguar Knights and Coyote Knights. They form the officer class, while conscripts and apprentice Knights fill the ranks. Each order has its own regiments, and draw recruits from all over the Empire.

The Eagle Knights are the oldest and most prestigious order. They are also the most stodgy and traditional. Eagle regiments switched over to firearms only in this century, after a disastrous defeat by Mexican bandits in 1836. The Eagle Knights are much like members of a high-class British regiment . . . brave, undisciplined, and hard-drinking.

Jaguar Knights are less prestigious than the Eagle Knights, but they win more battles. Jaguar regiments are the most professional units in the Mayan army, and pay the most attention to training and doctrine. In battle they are fearless and reliable. Off the field, Jaguar Knights are like Prussians in their stiff reserve and precision.

Coyote Knights are the intellectuals of the Mayan army. Coyote regiments often experiment with new weapons and tactics, and Coyote Knights make up the bulk of the Mayan intelligence service. Many Coyote regiments are technical specialists . . . the engineers, artillery, signal corps and snipers are all Coyote units. Coyote officers are more willing to use psychological warfare, dirty tricks and unorthodox tactics.

The Mayan army has platoons of ten men, commanded by two Knights. Four platoons make up a company, with two more officers in charge. Four companies form a battalion of 200 men, and four battalions make up a regiment. The Mayan army has 13 regiments in all. The Eagle and Jaguar orders each have four infantry regiments and one cavalry regiment, while Coyote order has one infantry, one cavalry and the new Coyote technical regiment, which incorporates an engineer battalion, a signal and intelligence battalion, and two artillery battalions. The cavalry are mostly recruited in the western regions, where the Mexican love of horsemanship has seeped across the border. They are mounted on mules, which survive better in the Yucatan climate.

The army is currently equipped with American-made Springfield rifles sold as surplus at the end of the Civil War. Officers in the Eagle regiments carry old-fashioned war clubs studded with obsidian flakes. Other officers use steel swords and pistols.

During the period of Spanish domination the Maya did not maintain any ships of war, but since their neighbors have become independent the Maya have needed ships to protect their shores. Most of their fleet consists of small sloops and gunboats for coastal defense. They did purchase one steam ironclad, the *Chac*, from a British shipyard in 1870 (the ship was originally commissioned by the Confederacy, but was not finished when the Civil War ended).

Foreign Affairs

For the past few centuries the Maya have had little interest in the world beyond the borders of their empire. Their neighbors the Aztecs were never exactly pleasant people to be near, and for decades all contact with the Spanish came in the form of conquering expeditions. During Spain's heyday, the Mayan Empire was effectively a protectorate, and foreign ships seldom dared to slip past the watchful Spanish patrols.

The Mayan Empire began opening up cautiously to the outside world with the decline of Spanish power, beginning around 1700. Smugglers began to bring in European goods, and with them rumors of interesting ideas . . . astronomy and mathematics to rival the Mayan achievements, useful arts and industries, and tentative offers of friendship from the rulers of mysterious lands called "England" and "France."

But the breakup of Spanish power also brought pirate raids on coastal towns, and new missionaries preaching a variant form of Christianity who were just as bothersome to the Mayan priests as the Spanish Jesuits had been. The Maya saw little reason to end their policy of isolation during the 18th Century, and only a few scholars ventured to Spain and Italy. Many pirates did seek refuge in the swampy eastern part of the Yucatan, and while the government periodically sent in troops to root them out, the pirates did forge ties with the local inhabitants, so that many Maya from that region later went to sea themselves as traders or smugglers.

It was only with the wave of independence movements sweeping Latin America in the wake of the Napoleonic wars that the Maya began opening up to the outside. Instead of haughty and aggressive empires, their new neighbors were mostly small and unstable republics, eager for the trade and military protection the Maya could provide. For the minor states of Central America, the Mayan Empire has been a useful counterweight to the influence of big powers like Mexico, the United States and Great Britain.

During his long reign the present Emperor has tried to encourage contact with other lands to prevent the Mayan Empire from falling too far behind. The technological marvels he saw in New Europa impressed him deeply, as did reports of British and French empire-building in Africa and Asia. To prevent his own land from becoming some colonial power's property, Emperor Yax U Aac has tried to encourage domestic industries, and has cultivated alliances with Brazil and Mexico. His attitude towards the United States is cordial but wary.

Religion

The religion of the Maya is extremely complex, and many large books have been filled by scholars trying to explain Mayan religion to outsiders.

The Maya worship a vast pantheon of 166 gods, but the large number results from the fact that each god has multiple aspects. The most sophisticated theologians among them maintain that all the gods are merely aspects of a single divinity known as Hunab Ku. The following is a list of only the most important Mayan gods:

Itzamna is the chief of the Mayan pantheon, the inventor of writing and the calendar. He is portrayed as an aged man, but is also identified with the alligator. Itzamna and his wife Ix Chel are the parents of all the other Mayan gods.

Ix Chel is the goddess of the rainbow, of healing and of weaving. Medicine among the Maya . . . both scientific and magical . . . is quite advanced. The Empire's greatest medical center is the huge complex surrounding the Temple of Ix Chel, on the island of Cozumel. At the temple there are several large hospitals, a medical school, and libraries holding the accumulated medical lore of the Maya. Ix Chel is depicted as an old woman, sometimes with serpents in her hair.

Ah Kinchil is the Sun god, and at night he transforms into the Jaguar god as he journeys through the underworld. Ah Kinchil has the form of a powerful youth, sometimes with a jaguar mask.

Ix Ch'up is the Moon goddess, who is the consort of Ah Kinchil. She is portrayed as a beautiful maiden. The rabbit is associated with the Moon goddess.

There are four Rain Gods, called Chacs. Each has a different color corresponding to the corners of the world (red for east, white for north, black for west and yellow for south). The cenote at Chichen Itza is sacred to the rain gods. Intriguingly, the Chacs are said to be the ancestors of dwarfs, which live underground.

Besides these chief deities, the Maya honor scores of lesser gods, including Ah Puch, the god of death; Ek Chuah, the god of merchants and chocolate-growers; the heroic twins Xbalanque and Hunahpu; Tohil, the god of fire and change; Hun Hunahpu, the corn god; and many others.

Sacrifice

The Mayan religion, like the extinct Aztec faith, includes blood sacrifice. The practice of killing living humans for their magical power was adopted from the Aztecs, and was almost completely abolished by Hunac Ceel's reforms.

Modern Mayan religion still includes blood offerings to the gods, but nowadays the faithful offer up their own blood willingly and in safe amounts. Animals are also given to the gods, particularly to the Chacs. Their sacrifices are thrown into the sacred well at Chichen Itza.

But the reforms did not completely do away with human sacrifice. Each year a volunteer must leap into the sacred well to appease the Chacs. Amazingly, there are always plenty of volunteers, and would-be sacrifices must often wait several years before they can jump. Stranger still, attempts to drag the cenote to recover bones or treasure have never brought up anything . . . it is as if whatever falls into the sacred well vanishes from the world.

Astrology and Astronomy

Astrology is a very important part of the Mayan religion. Nearly all priests are skilled astrologers, and the sophisticated Mayan calendar was developed as a tool for divination. Priests kept detailed records for centuries of the motions of the planets, and created a superb set of tables for calculating planetary positions.

According to Mayan myth, the universe follows cycles of creation and destruction, each lasting about 5200 years. The Maya believe the last cycle began in 3113 B.C., and that the world will end in A.D. 2011, after which a new creation will make a better universe.

Mayan astrologers also perform a great deal of scientific astronomy. The introduction of the Copernican model of the heavens and Newtonian physics caused a small revolution in Mayan science. Today Mayan astronomers are among the best in the world, with a modern observatory at Jacaltenango in the southern mountains and thousands of years of data to draw upon. Yet, strange as it seems to New European scientists, Mayan astronomers also determine auspicious dates and interpret the signs of the heavens.

Other Religions in the Empire

Over the years, Spanish missionaries did make some converts among the Maya. Today there are some thirteen thousand Catholics in the Mayan Empire, mostly in the western part of the kingdom. There are also a surprising number of Jews in the Mayan Empire, most of them descendants of those expelled from Spain by the Inquisition. Sisal has a colony of nearly a thousand Jews, and Mayapan is home to another thousand.

A small population in the southwest follow the ancient Aztec religion and preserve a remnant of Aztec civilization under the protection of the Mayan Empire. The Aztecs are forbidden to practice death magic but are otherwise free to follow their gods.

Mayan Magic

Mayan magicians are almost all priests and nobles. Midgets and hunchbacks among the Maya often show a great deal of magical talent. The Maya have four great magical books, said to be written by their chief god Itzamna himself. Few sorcerers are permitted to study more than one book.

The Codex of the Observatory

Kept at the great center of astronomy at Jacaltenango, this book holds all the Mayan secrets of astrology and divination. Most of the book is devoted to tables of data on planetary motions. It includes the lore of *Scrying*. By means of astrological calculations, the astronomer-priests can perform *Precognition*, seeing potential future events; and *Retrocognition*, seeing things that happened in the past.

The Codex of the Sacred Well

Guarded by the priests at the cenote of Chichen Itza, this book contains Mayan magic for promoting fertility of the land and controlling the underground rivers. The Mayan kings all study this book. Sir Richard Burton learned the lore of *Summon the Earthquake* from this text, and the lore of *Shaping the Element* and *Elemental Barrier* are also known to the Druids. Unique to the Codex are the disciplines of *Seeking the Element*, which allows the caster to sense the presence of one of the four magical Elements; and *Create the Element*, which lets the mage generate a volume of one of the Elements out of nothing.

The Codex of the Hospital

The accumulated knowledge of the temple of Ix Chel on Cozumel Island, this book holds all the Mayan secrets of healing. After the only copy was nearly destroyed by the Spanish invasion, the Maya have placed duplicates in each hospital in their kingdom. The Codex includes much mundane medical knowledge in addition to its magical Lore. The book teaches students how to *Cast Out Illness* and *Ward Off Sickness*, but also how to cause sickness in others. In addition it tells how to *Speed Healing*, which doubles the normal healing rate for injuries.

The Codex of the Ball-Court

Brought to Yucatan by the Itza, this book includes much magical knowledge from Mexico. Mayan nobles study the lore in this book, which contains mystical knowledge of conditioning the body. Several copies exist, kept by important noble families around the Empire. The book teaches such arts as "Bear Strength," or "Puma Swiftmess" . . . all aspects of the lore *Invest With Powers of a Known Form*. A second volume containing secrets of Aztec death-magic was destroyed by order of the Emperor in 1732.

Thaumic Energy Requirements For New Effects

Precognition: 10

Retrocognition: 6

Cast Out Illness: 10

Ward Off Illness: 4

Speed Healing: 6

Seeking the Element: 4

Creating the Element: 8

Technology

The Mayan Empire has a sophisticated culture with many skilled craftsmen, but suffers from a crippling lack of resources. As a result, Mayan technology is a triumph of making do with primitive materials. Yucatan has no coal deposits (and the petroleum is all off-shore and unknown in the Age of Steam), and very little water power. The forests are scanty, so the chief sources of energy are wind power and muscle. Metals are also scarce, and the lack of fuel for smelting makes them quite expensive, so things like stone and wood are commonly used where New Europeans would employ steel or brass. Mayan technology uses what outsiders would call "primitive" materials and power to achieve sophisticated results.

In *GURPS* terms, the Mayan Empire is mostly TL4, but with some unusual "TL4+1" inventions. Any technology which doesn't require large factories or sources of power, like medicine and the sciences, is TL5. In the poorer sections of the country, the peasants live at TL2 or even below. The army has imported TL5 guns and equipment, but the Emperor is painfully aware that his country's defenses rely on the American republics and New Europa for supply.

An example of Mayan "windpunk" technology is the Sisal Railway, connecting the port of Sisal with the nearby city of Dzibilchaltun. It uses rails of carved stone, carefully fitted together by master stonemasons. The trains themselves are wind-powered. Huge windmills mounted on the locomotive provide the energy needed to drive the train. The locomotive sacrifices speed for pulling power, so the wind railway can only reach 10 miles per hour with a string of three cars. On calm days a team of oxen take over. Other examples of "windtech" abound: in the city of Mayapan the Hotel Yucatan has a windmill on the roof which pumps water for the plumbing system and hauls up the counterweights which operate the elevator. An inventive engineering officer of the Coyote Knights has even devised a windmill-powered repeating catapult which protects the city of Sisal from aerial pirates.



by Dylan Craig

"*Faire Camerone*, they call it. Means to 'do a Camerone' -- 'sfrom a battle where eight of ours bayonet-charged a few hundred Mexican cavalry in the closing minutes of some uneven battle. Eight against a thousand, know what I mean? That's the Legion for you. Death and glory. But what if it's eight Legionnaires against a thousand Legionnaires -- and the thousand are already dead? That's what me and my seven mates are thinking, here in this trench . . . "

It is the winter of 18___. Europe finds itself under assault by the undead, who are spreading their zones of influence along the Mediterranean coast and up into the heartlands of France, Italy, Greece, and Spain. These beleaguered nations are holding them off, for now, but it cannot be long before their resolve breaks and the undead columns march inexorably into Germany, Russia, and the rest of the continent.

It was eighteen months ago that the French Minister of War began to receive the first desperate communications from the commanders of the larger Algerian garrisons. Entire companies were going missing while on patrol; traces of bloody battle were usually found, most of which indicated that the Legionnaires and their native auxiliaries had been attacked by a superior force and wiped out, but not a single body could ever be recovered. In addition, the desert patrols were discovering more and more abandoned native settlements. The commanders urgently requested reinforcements; all the signs indicated that a fresh offensive against the colonial presence was being prepared, and the commanders wanted the wherewithal to march against the mountain strongholds which they suspected would be used as staging points, to destroy the offensive before it got off the ground. The reinforcements were duly dispatched; large recruitment drives across the continent ensured that a steady stream of volunteers poured into the Foreign Legion's training battalions. If the Algerian rebels were indeed massing for attack, then the preemptive strike envisaged by the Legion commanders could, if successful, finish the rebels as a military force for decades, and the French government intended to provide the generals with all the manpower they needed for such a task.

It took nine months for the preparations to be completed; during this time, patrol losses had become so regular that commanders feared a wide-scale mutiny if they continued to assign patrol duties. However, to everyone's relief, the long-awaited offensive had still not materialized, and with the disembarkation of the reinforcements and the commencement of their march into the interior, most felt that the shoe was about to be transferred, firmly, to the other foot. Fortresses were stripped of all but their essential staff; three massive Legion columns were assembled and prepared to strike deep into rebel territory. It was there that they met their long-lost Legion comrades.

There were no survivors.

Weeks went by, then months. To send out an expeditionary force to determine the fate of the three columns would have required further depletion of the now-tiny Legion garrison; this was being painstakingly debated via telegraph, when all communication from Algeria ceased. Civilian shipping which had fled the Algerian coast spoke of towns falling to an unstoppable assault by armies of Legionnaires! The French government had little chance to react to this news before further reports that coastal towns all along the Mediterranean coast were now under artillery and infantry assault. Reports were patchy, but refugees fleeing north spoke of the renegade Legionnaires as demons or madmen, impervious to damage and with a terrible lust for human flesh.

What the French government didn't know -- in fairness, *could* not know -- was that the Legionnaires currently laying waste to *belle France* were no longer human, or even alive. Raised from the dead by ancient magics, they were now the tools of a vengeful Algerian sorcerer-hermit, whose agenda was nothing less than the complete subjugation and extermination of the Western heathen invaders.

All attempts at diplomacy or interaction of any sort failed. Town after town fell, and as the first shells began to slam into Paris, the French government fled to London. There, in hushed conferences, the heads of the European states have begun their debates on how to counter this seemingly unstoppable invasion.

Several courses of action have already been suggested, but rivalries, suspicion, and hidden agendas have proved to be an insurmountable problem in this regard. For instance; a Prussian suggestion for incendiary attacks on "infested" French cities by air was vetoed by the French as a transparent excuse to cripple the French industrial base, and a French request for gunboats to destroy the Algerian ports which seem to be the resupply nexus for the invasion force was met with unequivocal scorn as the other delegates accused the French representatives of trying to save themselves the expense and effort of pacifying their own rogue colonies. While the delegates bicker, European cities are emptying and entire armies are deserting in the face of the Legion onslaught. If the invasion is to be stopped, something must be done soon.

Only Great Britain, isolated from the threat for the time being, has maintained a cool head; the British training camps and steelyards are busy day and night, preparing the army and navy for the battles to come. It is even rumored that agents of the Foreign Office have penetrated into Legion-held territories to gather intelligence about the invaders, their leaders, and their plans for conquest.

Hungry Ones: These ancient spirits are the motivating force behind the Legion. Pale, glowing shapes devoid of form, they exist partially in our world and partially in the next. They can pass through solid objects, float above the ground, and change their shape (but not their consistency or color) at will. Their presence is indicated by a thin, piping, ceaseless wail.

In game terms, they can be thought of as bundles of pure Essence. Each Hungry One has 20 Essence; these points are used up in the process of raising Legionnaires. The expenditure of a single Essence point raises all dead bodies within **D6x3** yards. When a Hungry One's Essence is depleted, it ceases to exist; in addition, they cannot regain Essence by any means. However, five separate Hungry Ones can 'spawn' a new Hungry One with a full complement of Essence by each expending an Essence Point. This process takes one hour.

Hungry Ones are highly susceptible to the powers of the Inspired; an Inspired spending Essence Points to banish a Hungry One only needs to match half their target's remaining Essence, or a third if their attempt takes place while standing in a location particularly significant to their faith. Damage caused by miracles such as **Holy Fire** is applied directly to Essence if used on a Hungry One, and miracles such as **Binding** are also effective against them.

Story Ideas

Last Train out of Nice

The characters are the commanding officers of a ragged French unit whose orders are to hold the railway station of the city of Nice until the civilian population can be evacuated. They have a few hours to prepare their defenses before the Legion arrive in strength. Can they hold their line in the face of artillery, unstoppable wave assaults, and ammunition shortages? When the command center is cut off from the

Zombie Legionnaire

Str: 2	Dex: 2
Int: 1	Per: 1
Con: 2	Wil: 2
Spd: 4	Ess: 6
DPs: 15	Pow: 25

Skills: Brawling 2, Guns (Rifle) 2, Guns (Machine Gun) 2, Hand Weapon (Bayonet) 2, Stealth 1

Weak Spot: The Heart

Getting Around: Life-like
Strength: Dead Joe Average, Damage Resistant

Senses: Like the Dead, X-ray Vision

Sustenance: Daily, Sweetbreads (Heart)

Intelligence: Tool Use 2, Teamwork

Spreading the Love: Only the Dead

Gear: Lebel Rifle (use 7.62 bolt-action civilian rifle, but

last train as it departs, can they cut their way through a wall of foes to reach safety?

Cloak and Dagger

The characters are agents of the British Foreign Office, on assignment to gather intelligence about conditions behind enemy lines. Expecting a sympathetic local population and counting on the anonymity bestowed by being a "face in a crowd," they are completely unprepared for the utter desolation they encounter. Nothing moves but the Legion Patrols and scavenging animals; Paris is a boneyard piled high with the half-eaten bodies of executed civilians. Several mysterious, robed humans are also in evidence, and appear to display some kind of control over the Legionnaires. The characters must decide which aspects of their mission are still attainable, and then try to survive until their pickup returns in a week's time.

Meat Trap

The information gathered by covert investigations behind enemy lines has revealed the weaknesses and origin of the Zombie Legions to the British government. To replenish its losses and feed its soldiers, the Zombie Legion requires hearts. If the zombie hordes can be trapped somewhere where "food" is low, and then attacked at long range, the armies of the living might just have a chance to strike a telling blow. Trainloads of convicts and "political undesirables" are shipped from all over France, Germany, and Russia to provide the bait; several easily isolatable towns in the path of the Legion advance are cleared and booby-trapped. All the characters have to do is provide token resistance, and then pull back to the trenches and let the artillery and mines do their job. But what if an inopportune riot among the prisoners traps them between the convicts and the advancing undead? Conversely, what if one of the players recognizes a relative, old friend, or lover among the "bait" as they withdraw?

reduce CAP to 8)

Note: Zombie Legionnaires do not Spread the Love. This task is undertaken by the packs of Hungry Ones that follow the Legions. The number of Hungry Ones in existence at any one time may never exceed 144; in general, one Hungry One is encountered per twenty Legionnaires, to a maximum of 15-20 per area, city, or battle.

Zombie Legionnaires do not feed indiscriminately, and will wait until a battle is finished before feasting.

Only a corpse with an intact heart may be raised as a Zombie.

Red Monsters from Beyond the Moon!



by Joe Taylor

At first, the creatures were thought to be some previously-unknown species of tiger which lived only in the deepest jungles of the Dark Continent.

When enough railway workers disappeared that the work slowed, hunters were sent in to deal with the new man-eaters. When the hunters failed to return, soldiers were sent. Then more soldiers. Then all contact with the outpost was lost and further down the line, people began seeing red-purple shapes in the wilderness just beyond the towns. Large shapes, like long tigers without legs . . .

Thus *GURPS War Against The Chtorr* meets *GURPS Steampunk*.

In this scenario, the Chtorran invasion begins in the 19th century rather than the 21st. It assumes that the plagues caused by Chtorran microbes in the novels do not happen -- this keeps the steampunk setting intact and gives humans a fighting chance. The infestation begins in remote, "uncivilized" areas which are only just being explored. First the worms appear in Africa, but are soon spotted in the Amazon, Tasmania, and near the Rocky Mountains. Characters (and players unfamiliar with the Chtorr series) may assume that the strange creatures are just another one of the many unusual animals native to these lands which Europeans have never seen. When the worms and other Chtorran life-forms begin to rapidly spread, replacing Terran flora and fauna, it becomes evident that something else is going on. Unknown enclaves in South East Asia grow unmolested until they begin to spill over and threaten India and China. It is only a matter of time before the ravenous gastropedes are stalking the black forests of Germany. Biologists debating theories of evolution now have a totally different ecology to observe while scientists push the technology envelope to find new ways of combating the threat.

And the Chtorran infestation is a difficult threat to combat at TL5 or TL5(+1). Science just barely has the tools necessary to understand the ecological threat the alien life poses and the larger implications of it may still elude scientists until much of the world is already "Chtorraformed."

The Great Powers will be more inclined to fight the invading ecology with physical military means, concentrating on destroying the gastropedes. This is a task which military technology of the period may not be up to.

Any kinetic damage done to a Chtorran (such as with bullets) which penetrates its DR is divided by 10 before being applied to its Hit Points.

Tech level 5 firearms do not stand a chance of harming a worm. Before a GM decides to weaken the gastropedes to make the fight more fair, it should be pointed out that even TL8 firearms are just as useless and that developing new weapons to fight with is what *War Against The Chtorr* and *Steampunk* are all about. The TL5(+1) electric gatling does only slightly less damage than an AM-280 and has a higher RoF. Explosive damage, if the bomb or shell is in contact with the Chtorran when it goes off, does double damage before being divided by 10, so artillery and land ironclads can be somewhat effective. If the campaign has or develops etheric shock weapons, they would act like particle beams and do full damage which is not reduced, as would a lightning cannon (see p. STM89). Damage from a wind cannon would be reduced and damage from a vibra-cannon which penetrates DR is first divided by 10, then is -1 per full 1,000 lbs. of target weight.

Chtorrans hit by a flasher or hand flasher roll at HT-2 to avoid their effects, though being blinded often drives them into a rage (and isn't too effective since they can still track their prey by smell).

Even if the campaign includes these "baroque weapons," the most effective means of fighting a gastropede is with fire. Flame weapons do an extra +2d and damage is not reduced. Tech level 5(+1) flamethrowers would not be any different in operation than those of TL6. *GURPS High Tech* has weapon stats for a man-portable flamethrower from WWI and one from WWII -- both are TL6. *GURPS Vehicles* can be used to design vehicular flamethrowers for those land ironclads. What effect chemical weapons such as Mustard Gas would have on Chtorran life forms is anybody's guess, but the results certainly wouldn't be pretty.

So the PCs ought to be able to dish out some damage once they find the right weapon systems to use. However, the Chtorrans may still need to be toned down a bit for this setting. A charging gastropede will probably be the fastest thing on a TL 5(+1) battlefield, too fast for heavy weapons to track them. A fully adult worm might be more than a match for even steam-powered mecha like the O-Daisuchiimu. Considering that Steampunk weapons often have a very low RoF or even require time to reload between each shot, a GM may want to reduce the Chtorrans' move score to slow the pace of the battles a bit. This is probably the only area the GM will need to tinker with in order to keep things balanced and give the PCs a chance.

Still, the worms should remain exceedingly hard to beat. If the PCs will need any slack from the GM, it should probably be that he reduces the rate at which the infestation grows and changes. Always keep it just ahead of mankind's ability to manage it, but since the campaign world won't have the luxury of instant worldwide communication, that will probably mean things proceed at a slower pace than in the novels.

GURPS War Against The Chtorr recommends doing without the plagues in any campaign set below TL7. Much of the flavor of a steampunk campaign comes not only from the technology, but from the culture of the Victorian Age, which would certainly be destroyed if Chtorran diseases run rampant. The GM can, of course, include the Chtorran plagues in his campaign if he wants.

Diseases such as Influenza and Yellow Fever were still a common cause of death in the 19th century, so the plagues could be incorporated without disturbing the Victorian feel too much. In this case, the first step to fighting off the invasion is to discover some sort of "Chtorricillin" to beat the germs -- an effort which the PCs will no doubt be at the forefront of.

The tone of the campaign should be somewhat different than that of a normal War Against The Chtorr game. The 19th century was a time when everyone thought that science would soon be able to solve any and all of mankind's problems. Even when faced with a problem 19th century science is woefully inadequate to fight, that positive attitude should still prevail. This invasion takes place in a world which has not been devastated by plagues, so the social upheaval in the *Chtorr* novels is not present and the powers leading the fight will probably not be hindered by coalitions of Third- and Fourth-World countries. However, the invasion can move and change faster than the rate at which information can be transmitted and there are parts of the world which are still unknown where the alien ecology can grow deep roots undisturbed. Humanity should begin fighting the invasion as soon as it appears because it will be a long time before a way to make real progress is found. It is suggested that the GM begin the campaign in a historical TL5, 19th century setting and let it develop into a steampunk TL5(+1) world as a result of fighting the invasion.

Adventure Seeds

First Contact

An important rail line under construction in Africa is being plagued by what seems to be a man-eating lion or tiger. Only a few native workers have gone missing but the rest are so frightened that all work has ceased. The PCs can be a small military unit or a group of hunters hired by the government, with a naturalist or two going along to study the creature.

The man-eater is actually a lone Chtorran gastropede, far more dangerous than any lion. When the party arrives at the work camp, rumors about the beast may clue them in that it is something different. If the party survives hunting the worm, this would make a good introductory adventure.

Trouble in Show-Low

Show-Low, Arizona (named after a card game) is a new boom town. The news of some gigantic man-eating worm found in Africa is largely regarded as a hoax, or at least no cause for concern in America.

Trouble begins when a local Indian village is destroyed and every last man, woman, and child in it vanishes. Other neighboring Indians are divided about what to do, but many blame the US government or the white folks of Show-Low. Some begin making raids on the town and tensions between the white settlers and local Indians rise until bloodshed looks inevitable.

When tempers reach their peak, with Indian warriors surrounding the town, a large family of six gastropedes -- the same ones who wiped out the Indian village -- attacks Show-Low. Can the settlers and Indians together right off the aliens? The PCs can be townsfolk, Indians, or adventurers just passing through who get caught up in the strife.

Expedition to the Amazon

The Royal Academy of Science is sponsoring a large-scale, coordinated effort to study the Chtorran infestation. A large cargo airship is being converted into a flying laboratory which will allow the scientists on board to conduct on-site investigations safely. The infestation in the Amazon jungle is one of the most developed and has had little interference by humans so the research will be conducted there. PCs of a scientific bent will be invited to join the expedition, while military types may be hired as security. While on board the airship, the PCs can rub elbows with the likes of Charles Darwin, Alfred Nobel, or Thomas Edison.

It's a chance for the players to experience some serious, scientific investigation of the infestation and really learn something about the threat. It's also a chance for them to find out some crucial information which could help mankind's struggle -- or for something to go terribly wrong and mankind lose some of the best scientific minds of the age.

* * *

An alternative Chtorr/Steampunk campaign can be set in Etheria (see p. STM126), where fantastic technology allows space travel in the 19th century. Instead of discovering tropical forests and amphibious primitives living on Venus, however, space travelers find a far more alien world, one with jungles as red as the surface of Mars and creatures resembling gigantic, carnivorous caterpillars. In this scenario, Venus, Earth's own neighbor, is the homeworld of the Chtorr! Europeans set up a few colonial outposts near the poles, where the most deadly creatures scarcely venture, but worm huts dot the horizon and only a few degrees of latitude away are vast mandala complexes with thousands upon thousands of worms.

Though the dense, steaming atmosphere of Venus seems to fit Chtorran life better than Earth, there are still aspects of the aliens which would seem to be incongruent with it being their homeworld. The GM can feel free to alter the habitat to fit the Chtorrans, alter the Chtorrans to fit their environment, or ignore the evidence all together -- perhaps Venus isn't the Chtorrans' homeworld here, either, and the infestation simply missed Earth and hit the next world. In this setting, Venus is supposedly a more primitive planet, yet here it boasts life forms far more developed and voracious than any on Earth. The simple explanation (if one is needed) is that Venus is indeed more primitive but it has not suffered any mass extinctions like the one that killed off the dinosaurs, therefore its current ecology is older.

In any case, the GM will have to handle a fully developed Chtorran ecology and fix the gaps in the food chain by deciding what a Chtorran gastropede's normal prey is -- and if anything preys on the worms in turn. The players will have to face a Chtorran ecology running at full speed, but one that is also stable. Once again, the GM will probably want to assume that Chtorran (or Veneran) diseases and micro-organisms will not pose a problem for the human race. It will be up to the GM to decide whether or not there is any intelligent Chtorran life -- something which was a

mystery in the novels -- and how it will react to the human invaders. In this setting, however, it is unlikely that there is an intelligent, sentient Chtorran species, but the average "animal" will probably be unexpectedly clever. Having to survive on the edge of a screaming, red, fully Chtorran world will likely be challenge enough.

Why would anyone want to go there to begin with, much less establish a colony in such a deadly, forbidding place? For the same reasons why Europeans ventured to the New World, or Australia, or Africa. The GM can make the planet home to rich mines of precious minerals or jewels -- some of which are unlike anything on Earth. The hallucinogenic Chtorran plants may lead to a parallel of the opium trade. Scientists will want to study the native life, too, especially with the mechanics of evolution in hot debate.

Human settlements on this Chtorran Venus could take the form of military outposts, scientific surveys, prison camps, mining and trade stations, or even full colonization efforts. The Chtorran wilderness also offers the ultimate in big game hunting.

A campaign in this setting will be different from a normal Chtorr campaign in that the characters will constantly be surrounded by a fully developed Chtorran ecology. Most adventures will come from carrying out whatever goals bring them there while surviving the local wildlife. When things get too rough, they can always go back home to an Earth which is not endangered by an invading ecology, and there is no need to worry about the survival of the planet or the human race. At least, not until samples from that alien world are brought back, either on purpose or accidentally, and begin to spread out of control . . .

Adventure Seeds

The Most Dangerous Game

The PCs are either big game hunters themselves or are hired by one to help with his expedition. In any case, the players will have to brave dangerous alien jungles for the glory of being the first man to mount a gastropede's mandibles as a trophy. Alternatively, the PCs are hunters on a mission for a scientific establishment and have been hired to capture and bring back a live gastropede. Without damaging the specimen, please.

Marooned

The PCs are on a transport carrying prisoners to a penal colony on Venus. They can be the ship's crew, the guards, or the prisoners. En route, the prisoners try to escape and take control of the ship. During the struggle, the ship goes off course and crashes hundreds of miles from the nearest human outpost. Lost in an alien jungle, surrounded by deadly life forms, the survivors must somehow work together to make their way back to civilization.

Heart of Darkness

A company which has several outposts on Venus set up to exploit the planet's resources and native life has lost contact with one of its camps furthest in the interior. The place was a mining camp which had recently begun to also collect some of the hallucinogenic local plants which are replacing opium in the drug trade. It was under the command of a former military officer, a highly-decorated individual who was also known as a deeply sensitive humanist. The PCs are sent to investigate this sudden lack of communication and determine whether or not the camp has been overrun (and whether or not anything can be salvaged). As the outpost is deep in the wilderness, the PCs must disembark at a colony nearer to the pole and their make to the site by way of a river, which the company has built its camps along and uses to transport goods. As the PCs stop at these camps along the way, they see cute, dancing bunnydogs devoured by a family of worms, they come under nightly attack by one strange species or another, and their progress may even be slowed by a seasonal pink storm and the resulting feeding frenzy. In short, they gradually experience more and more of the alienness of this terrifying place. When they finally arrive at the camp in question, they find that the commander has become infected with neural symbionts and is growing Chtorran "hair." He claims he can speak with the jungle and even keeps a baby gastropede as a pet! The workers and soldiers in the camp have gone renegade with

him. The commander intends to become a "native son" of this alien world and drive off all other human settlements, which he claims are a harmful blight to his new master.

The Earth: Edit, Save, Destroy?

A Moral Dilemma

by Loki Carbis

This particular Adventure Pizza will work best for characters of a morally dubious nature. Not necessarily evil characters -- in fact, characters who are solidly on the side of either evil or good will get less out of this than others. But many games feature characters who are morally grey -- from *Unknown Armies* to *Vampire: The Masquerade* to *Brave New World*. For *GURPS*, nearly any genre can be made to work with it except for the strictly realistic. This Adventure Pizza will only work in a game of moral grays, though it can be effective if only some members of a shadier nature.

The situation begins *en medias res*: the characters have just defeated a major opponent, possibly even their ultimate enemy, after whatever struggles and privations on their part, and are now in the control room of his (or hers, or its) headquarters. And it's here that they have discovered the secret project that they have previously heard only inconclusive rumors about. It's a completed device that the villain just couldn't stop boasting about the capabilities of -- and that the characters were only just in time to stop him from using . . .

. . . and it's fully operational.

The device itself could be magical, technological, or some combination of both depending on the nature of the campaign. What it does is simply incredible - it gives the user power over whatever the most common power source of the game world is. This could mean mana, electricity, wind, force power, psi, nanotech, steam, or whatever. This control is absolutely complete, and capable of very fine focus; one could use it, for example, to make either the entire world, or a single small box, or any volume of space between those extremes, cut off utterly from the energy source. It could even be used to do the same thing to a living being.

The system is voice-activated, and capable of very fine distinctions; it could be used to target all people traveling on trains at the moment, or all green-eyed, left-handed, divorcee single mothers, or all buildings containing a reproduction of Michelangelo's David. It's hooked up to a communications apparatus allowing it to cut into the major communications network of the world (whatever that may be), allowing the villain -- and the characters -- to broadcast whatever threats and ultimatums he feels like issuing.

In short, the players have just been handed Pandora's Box. There is no way to tell how well the device functions other than to use it. There's no user's manual, although the artificial (or possibly magically bound) intelligence of the device will respond truthfully to any question it's asked. GMs should be relatively generous in allowing the characters to experiment with it; there should be no nasty backlashes or unforeseen side-effects unless the characters do something blatantly stupid.

The one thing that the GM must do is make sure that the players realize the depth of the moral dilemma facing their characters. Their options are basically fourfold:

- They can use the device to take over the world.
- They can use the device to selectively and covertly "fix" the world.
- They can abandon the device.
- They can destroy the device.

Each of these has its own pitfalls and snares.

Taking over the world would be fairly easy, but keeping it under control may be harder. Cue the emergence of a resistance movement led by scientists, magic-users or whoever, employing an alternate technology that the device

cannot effect to battle their new overlords.

Fixing the world is probably the most tempting option, but it's not a solution to the moral dilemma, just a continuation with an increasing number of special cases. And the pattern of the device's effects is likely to be noticed by the campaign equivalent of Fox Mulder before too long. Alternately, it could just be a slower way of taking over the world.

Abandoning the device means that someone else will find it, and face the same moral decisions . . . and they may not choose as benignly as the characters did. In this case the characters have not only the special knowledge but also the moral obligation to stop whoever's got the device now.

Destroying the device is probably the safest choice, but even that contains its danger. The intelligence in the device contains all the instructions needed to destroy it safely . . . a long and pain-staking process. It also contains a self-destruct function. If this is used (or if the characters choose another means, such as high explosives or fireball spells), there will be a backlash that will fundamentally effect the world.

A wave of transforming energy of the type the device uses will spread out from it, blanketing the whole globe -- and causing massive destruction at the opposite point on the world. The transformation isn't necessarily destructive; it could even be benign. Likely effects includes mutations (a la *GURPS Wild Cards*), the total destruction of any technology or item using the same energy source (much like an Electro-Magnetic Pulse - see *GURPS Y2K* for details), blasting a gate to another reality (like the Banestorm of *GURPS Fantasy*), causing a [pole shift](#) (as described in *Suppressed Transmission*) or anything else you can imagine that seems appropriate.

What will the characters do?

Extra Spice

For the more technically-minded characters, pointing out that this device seems to violate several known principles of physics or thaumatology in its functioning could prove to be either a meaningless distraction or the seed of a whole new sub-campaign.

Pyramid Review

Another Fine Mess (for the Fudge RPG)

Published by [Grey Ghost Games](#)



Written by Ann Dupuis

32 pages; \$8.95

Another Fine Mess is a wonderfully original adventure. It is designed for use with the *Fudge* roleplaying system but can be easily adapted to any system that has stats for animals.

The premise of *AFM* is, at its core, a standard one for fantasy games: a party of adventurers, including rangers, warriors, thieves and a (sort of) magic-user, must enter a subterranean complex to rescue a friend from an evil sorcerer. What makes *Another Fine Mess* unique, however, is the fact that the members of the adventuring party are all animals, and relatively normal ones at that.

(SPOILER ALERT!)

At the adventure's outset the eight animal companions (the PCs) of a ranger/mage (known to them as "The Master") find themselves in a bit of a pickle. While investigating a number of disappearances in the wilderness, The Master himself disappears, leaving his companions to their own devices at his campsite. To make matters worse, the ranger's familiar, a cat named Shadow, receives a brief telepathic cry for help from the Master. Since the animals are the only good guys for miles around, it falls to them to save him.

While it uses the *Fudge* system, *Another Fine Mess* is a totally self-contained game, including six pages of "All the Rules You Need to Know." The fact that such rules can be presented in six pages is one of the beauties of *Fudge*. The compact nature of these rules is enhanced by *Fudge*'s storytelling and improvisational approach to gaming as well as by the fact that the game is best played with the pre-generated characters provided.

The pre-gens are important, if not absolutely necessary, to the success of the adventure. While the eight characters, Anaxagoras the Owl (a self-proclaimed wizard's apprentice), Bandit the Raccoon, Barney the Mutt, Isabelle the Bloodhound, Midnight the Horse, Penny the Peregrine Falcon, Shadow the Cat and (my favorite) Reek Havoc the Ferret, are all rather archetypal, they are interesting characters with enjoyable personalities. More than just a collection of game stats, these characters are described in detail in terms of their motivations, loyalties, likes/dislikes and personality quirks. Writer Ann Dupuis, who was one of the playtesters and contributing writers for both *GURPS Bunnies & Burrows* and *GURPS Bestiary*, is clearly an animal lover of the highest order. Anyone who has had a lot of exposure to animals, particularly of the types featured in the game, will immediately recognize how true to their species these characters are.

Clearly *Another Fine Mess* was originally designed as a gaming convention one-shot, probably to playtest the upcoming *Fudge Animal Companions* supplement. This creates a potential problem for the adventure concerning the requisite number of players. There are eight characters in this adventure, meaning it works best with eight players. Since the challenge of the game is overcoming normal animals' considerable limitations, successful resolution of the conflict is best facilitated by the cooperation of all eight characters; the absence of even one character can make things a lot more difficult. This can be resolved in a number of ways. The Game Master can either adjust the obstacles to account for any missing talents, run extra characters as NPCs, or allow some of the players to run more than one animal. Each of these techniques has its disadvantages, so an eight-member group is preferable. Because of the simplicity of its rules and the universal appeal of the story, *Another Fine Mess* is an excellent vehicle for introducing

potential players to roleplaying, especially if they are animal lovers.

Another Fine Mess is, in its own way, a dungeon crawl. The heroes must navigate a cave complex to reach the Sorcerer's lair, which can prove to be quite tricky for the horse. However, the Cave is a far cry from the "ten-foot-by-ten-foot" corridors of traditional dungeons. As much care has been spent to present the look, feel and features of an actual cave complex in a realistic manner as has been to make realistic animal characters. The cave has been designed in three dimensions, with both birds-eye-view and cross-section maps to aid visualization, and its features are geologically accurate. While this would make a traditional crawl difficult to map, it lends *AFM* a wonderfully gritty sense of realism (besides, no one in the party should be making maps anyway).

Obstacles along the way include a scent trail for the dogs, magically created hostile human/animal hybrids (called Abominations) for the dogs, birds and horse to fight, traps and mechanical devices for the racoon and ferret to use or disable and numerous natural obstacles that will alternately challenge the flyers and the crawlers, the large and the small and those with paws or hoofs. All of these lead to the final confrontation with the Mad Sorcerer.

Numerous possible ways to resolve the final conflict are presented, depending on the party's condition by the time of the climax. Guidelines are given for handling the Sorcerer's magical abilities and spell tactics without need for a codified magic system (the animals wouldn't understand magic anyway). If such a system is desired, there are a number of options, including the Scholarly Magic system from *Fudge Expanded Edition*, the detailed system from *A Magical Medley* or any number of home-brewed systems available at www.fudgerpg.com. Given the characters' widely disparate combat capabilities, the final conflict has the potential to become a wildly entertaining brouhaha as a powerful sorcerer must face the difficulties of targeting dogs, falcons, and ferrets with fireballs. Game Masters should play this up to the fullest.

(END SPOILER ALERT)

In addition to All the Rules You Need to Know, the appendix includes numerous adventure seeds to continue the fun beyond this story as well as suggestions for how the adventure can be adapted for more traditional (read: anthropomorphic) parties. While doing so is certainly possible, the adventure would lose most of its flavor and end up being a fairly typical and somewhat boring dungeon crawl. It works best as is, even if that means limiting it to a one-shot.

Another Fine Mess is an entertaining and original adventure that serves as a perfect introduction to roleplaying in general, *Fudge* in particular and playing non-anthropomorphic animals as characters in the very specific. The original artwork is limited to a few illustrations of some of the Abominations, while the remainder of the book is served by clip art of the animal types and cave formations that appear in the story. While clip-art is usually annoying it is well suited to this vehicle and its use helps keep the idea of playing animals grounded in reality. There is one clip-art picture of The Master that looks disturbingly similar to Errol Flynn that probably could have been omitted, but most of the pictures work. Maps are simple affairs presented on the inside front cover, while the back cover has a very useful combat summary sheet.

If *Another Fine Mess* is any indication, we can expect some great things from Grey Ghost Press and *Fudge* in the near future.

-- Neal Byles

Pyramid Pick

Pyramid Pick: The Works Card Game

The Works Card Game

Published by [James Ernest Games](#) and Studio Foglio



Designed by James Ernest

Illustrated by Phil Foglio and James Ernest

112 cards, rule sheet; \$14.95

Just like the mythical phoenix rising from its own ashes (if the phoenix was a card game and was not on fire and was real), *The Works* rises from the ashes of an older game, *XXXenophile*. Published in 1996 and based on a Phil Foglio comic book, *XXXenophile* was a nifty card game that got lost in the CCG glut. That it was for sale to adults only did not help.

The Works shares most of *XXXenophile*'s rules, drops collectibility for a fixed deck, and is based on a new Phil Foglio comic book, *Girl Genius*. The story is a gaslight, steampunk (without the punk) setting where super geniuses, called Sparks, build robots, called Clanks, and watch them wreak havoc on the countryside. In *The Works*, two or more players manipulate the cogs of a giant machine to "pop" cards out of it and score points. These cogs are actually many of the characters from the comic. The theme may hang a little loosely, but the rules set is sound and deserves this second chance.

Play begins by dealing every player five cards and then building a latticework of twelve face-down cards on the table. Each turn, a player will flip over a face-down card then spin one card 180 degrees to see if it "pops", meaning that they place it in their score pile. If there are still face-down cards, players can spin any card they like, but if all cards are face up, then they must pop at least one card. If no player sees a way to pop a card, then they reshuffle the board and lay the cards face down again.

Each card in *The Works* features a character from *Girl Genius*, a name plus some descriptive text, a point value, and a set of different symbols each of its four edges. When a player spins a card, he checks all four edges to see if the symbols on the spun card match the symbols on the edges of an adjacent card. If the symbols match, one, or possibly both of the cards will pop. If the symbols match on multiple cards, then the player will pop more than one card. A player replaces the popped cards with cards from their hands, then draws back up to five.

Finally, many of the cards have game instructions that the player must follow after popping it. Some cards allow a player to pop another card that has a specific piece of descriptive text. Others force the player to lose a turn. Some move cards from one score pile to another. Others allow a player to move cards from her hand to her score pile, or vice versa. The first player to reach 100 points worth of popped cards wins.

At first glance, *The Works* seems to be a game of chance. Since the board is dealt out randomly and players must turn over cards without seeing them, some players will be able to pop cards due to sheer luck. After a few games, however, patient players will discover several interesting challenges.

Primarily, *The Works* is a game of setting yourself up for a good move while leaving bad moves for your opponent. Players must be careful when replacing a card that they have popped so that it does not leave a good opportunity for their adversaries. At its most subtle, this challenge involves playing cards that will work well for you but will work

poorly for anyone else. For example, if you place a card that, when popped, forces players to lose a turn if they have no Clanks in their hands, this card may be safe for you, but will be harmful to others players lacking Clanks.

While *The Works* can handle from two to six players, it works best with just two. In a game with multiple players, setting yourself up for a good move becomes much more difficult and the game seems to involve more luck. For example, in a two-player game, forcing your opponent to lose a turn is an important play. It means that you will be able to play some cards on the board, then pop them before your opponent has a shot at them. With more players, losing turns becomes more of a nuisance than a bold move.

The Works continues James Ernest's tradition of complex games hidden in simple rules. Phil Foglio's illustrations are as delightful as ever, and fans of the comic are sure to enjoy the full color art. *The Works* will quickly have you searching for Racing Dirigibles, avoiding Dr. Monahan's Rats, and rolling your eyes when yet another Mimmoth (a tiny woolly mammoth) comes on the board.

(Note for *XXXenophile* fans: *The Works* has virtually the same rules as *XXXenophile*. The biggest difference, besides the art, is that *The Works* does not have Gizmos or Settings. Those could appear, though, in an expansion if *The Works* proves successful.)

--Brad Weier

No Help For It, Part I

I'm a comic collector, and a comic reader.

And one of the common questions that pops into my mind when I'm reading comics is one that always pops into my mind when I'm running epic adventures:

Don't these people have a *phone*?!?

I mean, some world-threatening villain is about to complete The Plan, and he's being investigated by the New Warriors, Alpha Flight, the Teen Titans, or some other mid-level book constantly on the cusp of cancellation. In too many of these stories I find myself asking, "If this is so important, and the world is in so much danger, why aren't they calling the Fantastic Four, Avengers, Justice League, Superman, or anyone else they possibly can?!?"

Why doesn't the Enterprise call for every other ship in the quadrant? Why doesn't the detective get every other cop in the precinct to surround the mad bomber's headquarters?

The answer, of course, is that it's not very exciting for your protagonists to have other, better heroes on speed dial. But, while the writer in me appreciates that explanation, the reader and realist in me balks.

It's the same problem I tend to have with a lot of the more "epic" games I run. In most game worlds, the PCs are not the be-all and end-all; there are usually more powerful fish in the sea. So how do you create adventures that are grandiose in nature, yet keep the PCs from calling the FBI, the Jedi Academy, the Ghostbusters, or anyone else?

- **They aren't able to call anyone else.** If you keep your party away from any means of communication, there's no danger of them calling anyone. The heroes can be trapped deep underground, on a remote continent, in another dimension, or someplace else inconvenient.

The danger with this technique is that rapid communication and transportation is common in many genres. If you can teleport, or use a cell phone, or enter the astral plane, you can get help. Sure, you can say the mystic shielding surrounding the caves (or whatever) prevents teleportation/telepathy/cell phone use, but too much of this technique tends to drive players nuts. "Oh, right. The orbital space station is covered in Bolognium. Again. Why the heck did I spend all those points on Allies and Send Message?"

- **They aren't able to trust anyone else.** In conspiracy, horror, and other campaigns you can keep the heroes from contacting anyone else by making the heroes distrust potential aid. If they suspect the police are behind the Big Conspiracy, they're not very likely to give them a call when they get in trouble.

This technique presents its own problems. In the police conspiracy example, the party may well try to alert the media, other allies, or anyone who will listen with the accusations; logically, if they can turn up the heat at all, the Conspiracy will have to spend resources on dealing with those actions. If you as a GM want to avoid this possibility, there are several options. Maybe the group is only potentially untrustworthy; knowing there is a mole in the FBI doesn't mean the entire organization should be brought under fire, but it also doesn't mean the PCs should poke around there trying to find allies. Or maybe the organization is normally closely tied to one or more of the heroes. For example, if the church the priest belongs to is suspected of being infiltrated by dark forces -- but dark forces that might be overcome -- then there will be a strong pull to keep the matter private until the heroes can resolve the matter.

- **"We're out saving the world, but if you leave a message . . ."** One of the easier, and fairly non-cheesy, ways to keep the heroes on their own is to just say that anyone they might call is out doing similarly heroic (and time-consuming) deeds. This technique was somewhat common in Marvel comics for a while; a group would get in trouble, and they'd call the Fantastic Four (answering machine), the Avengers (butler), the X-Men (gone), and so on.

One problem with this technique is that it can stretch the believability of the world. If there really *are* ten earth-shattering crises going on at any one time, how impressive is it for the heroes to thwart one? "Sure, you took care of the 80-foot cockroach . . . but you should've seen the 200-footer the Mod Squadron defeated. Wow!"

A nice compromise is to have *almost* everyone the heroes call be busy. Let Moderately Useful Fuzzy Guy be around when the rest of the ultra-powerful super team is gone; let the Knights Who Fight be unavailable, but Kevin the eager squire be anxious to help. At least it will reinforce that there *are* rewards for calling for help, while not leaving any doubt in the minds of the heroes who *really* saved the day.

- **"We're here to help; how big is this problem, anyway?"** A *very* easy (and sneaky) technique for the GM is to make the problem too big for the heroes . . . but have the parts they can't handle happen off-camera. Consider, for example, if Dr. Düme has a weather machine that requires the heroes acquire two parts to neutralize. If you think the heroes are going to call in for help, why not increase that number to three (or more) parts, with the reinforcements running off to deal with the other -- newly invented -- part? As the GM you don't need to deal with inventing that part; just have them run off, successfully complete their part of the mission, and return with a few details. ("Whew! I didn't know kittens could be so deadly!")

(Of course, one or more players may want to accompany that group. Encourage them not to do such with Twix, experience points, cash, or pain, as necessary.)

Alternately, you could combine this technique with another above, and have the reinforcements be unavailable *because* they're dealing with some other aspect of this crisis. This keeps the number of earth-shaking events needed in the world down somewhat, and prevents the heroes from wanting to accompany or otherwise interfere with this plot.

There are a few other techniques I've used over the years; I'll probably talk about them next week.

In the interim, I'll be reading comics.

* * *

John Kovalic is back safely from Germany, but currently suffering from jet lag and the million little tasks that build up when one is away. Hopefully everyone's favorite cartoonist will be able to take a vacation from his vacation over the next week, and be back to us next week.

-- *Steven Marsh*

* * *

Last week's answer: The back of the box for **Stalingrad**, an Avalon Hill wargame from 1963. (Remember wargames?)

(*three stars*) "**Two-Headed Lernaean Bombardier Giant Space Hamster:** 'Well, we're certainly not likely to make this mistake again or at least not more than once again anyway.' "

Neither Hera Nor There: Hunting Amazons

*"And, furthermore, of roving Indian maids
Whose camping-grounds by Aethiopia lie,
And camels burdened even as mules, and bearing
Riders, as horses bear, mine ears have heard;
And tales of flesh-devouring mateless maids
Called Amazons . . ."*

-- Aeschylus, *The Suppliants*

Despite -- or perhaps because of -- their misogynist piggery, the ancient Greeks have left us an image of female power and independence to rival anything else in the vast cabinet of our subconscious wonders. Of course, to them, the Amazons were terrifying embodiments of all that was alien -- but even the 5th-century B.C. poet Hellanicus can't conceal a certain fascination when he describes them as "golden-shielded, silver-sworded, man-loving, boy-slaughtering Amazons." From whence, besides well-deserved Hellenic nightmares, did the Amazons spring? And what else do they get up to besides springing from nightmares? In honor of Wonder Woman's sixtieth birthday, then, let's chase us down some Amazons.

"In ancient times were the Amazons, daughters of Ares, dwelling beside the river Thermodon; they alone of the people round about were armed with iron, and they were first of all to mount horses, with which, owing to the inexperience of their foes, they surprised them and either caught those who fled, or outstripped those who pursued. They were accounted as men for their high courage, rather than as women for their sex; so much more did they seem to excel men in their spirit than to be at a disadvantage in their form. Ruling over many nations, they had in fact achieved the enslavement of those around them; yet, hearing by report concerning [Athens] how great was its renown, they were moved by increase of glory and high ambition to muster the most warlike of the nations and march with them against this city."

-- Lysias, *Funeral Oration 4-5*

To begin with, not even the skeptical Pausanias and Arrian doubted that the Amazons existed, and that they very nearly eradicated Athens. Compiling the ancient histories gets this narrative: Myrina, Queen of the Amazons, ascended to glory by sacking Atlantis. Now Queen of Atlantis, she perforce had to fight the Atlanteans' enemies, the Gorgons of Libya. The stories vary, but it seems Myrina got beaten and had to retreat to Cyrene, named for the Amazon princess who founded it. (The Amazons of Cyrene became powerful pirates, and some authorities say that they were the Cyrens, or Sirens, that Odysseus escaped.) Allying with Horus, they passed through Egypt and conquered Asia Minor, where they founded their capital, Themyscira, and more cities such as Ephesus and Mytilene. [Dionysos](#) warred against the Amazons with his army of Indian elephants, on his way to Greece and Heracles successfully took the girdle of Queen Hippolyta to Athens as one of his Labors.

King Eurystheus sent it back (no fool he), but then Theseus went to Themyscira and stole it, along with Hippolyta's daughter Queen Antiope. The Amazons assembled a mighty army to avenge this insult, and (after battling past Priam's Troy) swept down into Athens, fighting a vast battle in the very streets of the city. (Pausanias mentions many tombs of the Amazons visible even in the 2nd century A.D. along the roads of Attica.) Driven back by Athenian valor, Queen Penthesilea fought on the side of the Trojans against the now-hated Greeks, but the Amazons lost there, too. Eventually, the Amazons moved east into the Taurus mountains, from whence Queen Thalestris emerged in order to seduce Alexander and bear a mighty daughter who could restore the glory of the Amazons. According to Diodorus, however, she died on the way back to Amazonia before her eugenic ardor could bear fruit. The last Amazons died, according to Plutarch, fighting for Mithridates of Pontus against Pompey and the Romans.

"The women of the Sauromatae have continued from that day to the present to observe their ancient customs, frequently hunting on horseback with their husbands, sometimes even unaccompanied; in war taking the field; and wearing the very same dress as the men. The Sauromatae speak the language of Scythia, but have never talked it correctly, because the Amazons learnt it imperfectly at the first. Their marriage-law lays it down that no girl shall wed

till she has killed a man in battle. Sometimes it happens that a woman dies unmarried at an advanced age, having never been able in her whole lifetime to fulfil the condition."

-- Herodotos, *The Persian Wars* IV:116-117

Herodotos has an interesting story that probably, more than any other, explains who the Amazons "really" were. After their Athenian defeat, a band of Amazon prisoners rebelled and siezed an Athenian fleet, but caught in a storm wound up wrecked on the north coast of the Black Sea. They fought the Scythians to a draw, and the admiring Scythians married the Amazons to found the new tribe of the Sauromantians. Grave excavations have, in fact, proven that female warriors were relatively common among both the Scythians and the Sauromantians -- and anyone who requires more than horsewoman warriors, golden armor, and rough geographical accuracy from his Amazons is just trying too hard.

"Know that to the right hand of the Indies was an island called California, very near to the region of the Terrestrial Paradise, which was populated by black women, without there being any men among them, that almost like the Amazons was their style of living. These were of vigorous bodies and strong and ardent hearts and of great strength . . ."

-- Garcia Ordonez de Montalvo, *Exploits of Esplandian*

But for Amazon-hunters everywhere, if you can't have all three, get rid of geographical accuracy. Our old pal [Sir John Mandeville](#) places the Amazons both "below Scythia" and on an island "next to Chaldea," and says that they guard the Brazen Wall of Alexander against the soldiers of Antichrist. Prester John ruled the Amazon land of Great Feminie, and when he moved from Asia to Africa, he took the Amazons back with him. (And, indeed, both the Berbers and the Oyo of Dahomey have female warriors.) In 1542, Francisco de Orellana fought against women warriors in the Brazilian jungle, including twelve "very white and tall" women who each outfought ten men -- so he sensibly named the immense river he was on at the time the Amazon River. The same year, Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo sailed north from Baja and (on what grounds is hard to say) named the land there "California," after the Amazon kingdom in Montalvo's novel.

"When the king comes into the house, the throne-goddess calls an eagle and says to the eagle: 'Come, I am sending you to the sea. But when you go, look into the green forest, who is there?'

The eagle replies: 'I looked, and the goddesses, the infernal, ancient female divinities are kneeling there.'

And the throne asks: 'What are they doing?'

The eagle replies: 'She holds a distaff and they hold full spindles, and they are spinning the years of the king . . .'"

-- Hittite tablet, KUB XXIX 1, I 10-25

The Amazons in California (or Calyferne, as it was known in earlier stories) rode griffins, which was a big departure for them -- as horse-women, they were the mortal enemies of griffins in Greek myth. (Both Amazons and griffins love gold, too.) However, the Amazon city in Brazil (according to Orellana's chronicler) did feature lion statues prominently, and griffins liberally bedeck the old Amazon stomping-grounds in Hittite Asia Minor, as escorts of the night-goddess Shaushka. In the exciteable, but not crazy, *On the Trail of the Women Warriors*, Lyn Webster Wilde uncovers hints of a priestess cult tied to Cybele at the center of Hittite culture, and implies that their holy warriors (and the Hittite penchant for fighting in kilts) may have contributed to the strong "Amazon" presence along the south shore of the Black Sea. More Cybele fun appears when we note that Themyscira supposedly supported a sacred black stone, and that the "Diana of Ephesus" (a city founded by Amazons) was also a black meteorite. (There are those who link "Ka'aba" and "Kybele," while we're on the topic.) This begins to sound eerily like our old sky-cult of fallen [Spider Women](#) -- and the Amazons become the genemod superwoman products of parthenogenetic alien cloning.

"All over the ancient world populations were now set against other populations, as men were set against women . . . Wandering over the width and breadth of this disintegrating world, masses of refugees were everywhere fleeing their homelands, desperately searching for a haven, for a safe place to go. But there was no such place left in their new world. For this was now a world where, having violently deprived the Goddess and the female half of all power, gods and men of war ruled."

-- Riane Eisler, *The Chalice and the Blade*

Or, of course, they could simply have been the last remnants of a truly superior matriarchal civilization such as we

(well, such as Marija Gimbutas and Riane Eisler) find in Crete, Catal Huyuk, and other putatively Goddess-powered civilizations of ancient times. If people ever actually bull-danced, they were in pretty good shape -- perhaps the ancient Minoan martial artists survived, passing on their mystic lore from mother to daughter, occasionally recruiting Amazon (from the Armenian *maza*, "moon," not from Greek *a-mastos* "without breasts") warrior women to try recreating the lost Goddess power. Heck, maybe the Goddess' Amazons, treacherously betrayed by patriarchal Aryan sky-magic, fight a constant guerilla battle through time-travel and reality-quakes, slugging it out with Athens (and the "Nordic" [Loi](#)?) in a glorious Amazonomachia during the suspiciously-empty [hollow history](#) of pre-classical Greece. Maybe the Amazons (with their moon goddesses and mirrored shields) live behind the [mirror dimension](#) -- and perhaps the wick-fighting [Benandanti](#) ride out in dreams to keep our world safe for patriarchy, seeing that witches were also called "broom Amazons" in medieval times.

"Q: What advanced civilizations were before Atlantis and Lemuria?

A: Many.

Q: Was there an ancient advanced civilization located in the area we now call Antarctica?

A: Yes.

...

Q: Are there any remains of their civilization left?

A: Yes.

...

Q: Where might the remains be found?

A: South America. Amazon. Ancient legend of Amazons.

Q: Do any of our scientists know any of this?

A: Yes."

-- Laura Knight and a channeled Cassiopean, Dec. 10, 1994

The notion of Amazons as interdimensional warrior women from behind time and within reality would explain their weird geographical dispersion. Their [connection](#) with griffins may be another clue; since we've postulated a connection between the griffins and the Lemurians -- and since the Lemurians, also, appear both in [California](#) and inner Asia -- perhaps the Amazons are the very embodiment of sexuality and gender, somehow psychically "calved off" by the desperate-to-stay-chastely-astral Lemurians. If the Lemurians created the Amazons as repositories of ferocity and passion, it's no wonder that only Heracles and Theseus are their equal in battle. The Lemurian connection may also explain the colony of "white and tall" women in the Brazilian jungle, possibly connected to (or deadly rivals with) the evil Aryan city of [Akakor](#). Was Raleigh's secret Guiana mission an embassy from the Faerie Queene Elizabeth to the Amazon Queen Califia? Was Elizabeth an Amazon agent, priming the pump for their slow return to power? One of the most famous Brazilian UFO stories involves a very close encounter in 1967 between one Antonio Villas-Boas and a naked woman with blond hair -- another Amazon DNA raid? What else could a millennia-spanning, reality-hopping, transdimensional cult of genetically-perfect, bloodthirsty superwomen want? It makes one wonder.



by **Michele Armellini**

There are many sources that explain a lot about the best tanks in history. But what about the worst one?

Well, maybe "worst one" is too harsh; there were a few other tanks that weren't much better. Tank design was still immature in 1930, and Italian engineers had much to learn and very little money to spend. The result was a small, low-powered, thin-armored tankette, the CV3/33, the CV3/35 being a marginal improvement.

This armored vehicle could fit in several types of campaign: *GURPS Cliffhangers*, *GURPS Special Ops*, or *GURPS Time Travel*. If the campaign is slanted towards military operations, a tank is never out of place; but if it isn't, a tank is a nice surprise. Or a nasty one! It could be a weird twist in a *Supers*, *Horror*, or even *Martial Arts* campaign set in the 1930s. And during that decade, the CV3/35 was possibly the most widely available armored vehicle all over the world. It was cheap. It was exported everywhere. It saw employment in several wars.

If a 1930 adventure features a would-be tyrant, a private army, an ambitious warlord or a whimsical crime lord, they could all own this tankette. Just one of them, as a pet "terror" weapon, or even a full battalion!

This vehicle also has another great advantage. In the 30s, tanks weren't common, and the only sight of a fire-belching steel monster could be a reason for a Fright Check for poorly trained troops. On the other hand, the CV3/35 is far from invincible. A brave infantryman could defeat this thing in several ways (see below). Therefore, it is the ideal opponent of a truly heroic group of PCs.

Finally, it presents an amazing list of shortcomings. This makes it a useful tool in the hands of the wicked GM. Read the description and data, then think about those gun-happy, gung-ho mercenary adventurers. When the shady middleman tells them: "We're recruiting a true army. We even have tanks . . .", they won't resist. Then they end up driving a CV3/35, and they will learn technology isn't everything.

The Fiat-Ansaldo Carro Veloce CV3/35 Up Close

Inspired by the early British armored carriers, this vehicle was meant as a mobile MG nest. When it was developed, field guns were slow to train, anti-tank guns seemed an untested novelty, and tank-to-tank combat a far-fetched idea. Therefore, the CV3/35 was to avoid slow-reacting artillery fire thanks to sheer speed and its small size, and its armor wasn't meant to face cannons. The "assault" tank would support attacking infantry, raking the enemy positions with MG fire and suppressing strong points such as MG nests or mortar positions. Since it seemed to be reasonably fast, it could also support, or replace, the cavalry. So it was a tiny vehicle, with a 2-man crew, armed with MGs only. Its engine and drivetrain were quite reliable and it was reasonably fast, although not exceptionally so. Its armor was thin, cheap, and weak. Made with face-hardened, riveted plates of mediocre-quality steel, the armor was intended to withstand fire from small arms and rifle-caliber MGs.

It also had no accessories to speak of. The idea was to keep it cheap, fast (anything you add increases weight, thereby

reducing speed) and reliable (what isn't there can't break down). So, for instance, the standard model had no radio. No thought whatsoever was given to comfort or safety. Again out of economic considerations, the CV3/35 was not given a turret. The MGs were fitted in a superstructure, with a very limited field of fire. Being so fast and tiny was a double-edged sword. It did make the CV3/35 a small, elusive target. It also meant that any piece of seriously uneven ground (and the driver would often see it at the last second) could cause major trouble. A larger, longer tank would simply roll over, or down, or across a bump, a scarp, a shellhole, a wide trench. Not so the CV3/35, which was just 10 feet long (!). It could easily remain trapped in a hole! And it should be remembered that the tankette only had two hatches on the superstructure top. What does that mean for the crew if loss of control (p. V149) results in an overturned vehicle? The vehicle became a deadly trap for those inside. And see below for action by the enemy, to the same end.

As long as the opposition was what the CV3/35 had been designed for, the tank worked quite well. If the enemy only had basic-training infantry in the open or in earthworks, with light MGs and old-fashioned artillery support, the tankettes would win. Things changed if the battle featured any of the following:

- Anti-tank guns, cannon-armed tanks, or anti-aircraft guns
- Fortifications and/or very rough or cluttered ground
- Heavy machine guns, or other serious infantry AT weapons
- Well-trained and very determined infantry

Now, any WWII engagement would include at least one of the above elements. But by then the vehicle was hopelessly obsolete (it was used nevertheless). Its finest hours came in the early 30s . . . the time of *GURPS Cliffhangers*.

The CV3/35 According To GURPS Vehicles

TL6 tankette

Subassemblies: Tracks, Superstructure.

Body Features: 30° slope on Body Front and Superstructure Front (some sections had a circa 60° slope, but others weren't sloped at all).

Propulsion: tracked drivetrain, motive power 31kW (Bo, DR5, HP21).

Weaponry: 2 Fiat 8mm reel-fed MGs (Su, DR5, HP6). 2170 8mm standard rounds (Su, HP5). The MGs are linked.

Instruments: communicator: signal flags (Su).

Miscellaneous: access: 2 hatches (SuT).

Crew: Controls: mechanical. Crew stations: 2, cramped (half in Bo, half in Su). "Driver" runs controls, "Commander/Gunner" runs MGs. Occupancy: short.

Power: 31kW standard gasoline engine, uses 1.8 gph (Bo, DR5, HP17).

Fuel: standard 15-gallon tank, Fire +1 (Bo, DR3, HP11).

Access spaces: 10.44 cf (Bo).

Volumes: Body (47.44 cf), Tracks (28.47 cf), Superstructure (23.68 cf).

Surface Area: Bo 100, Tr 60, Su 50. Total surface area: 210.

Structure: cheap medium structure.

Hit Points: Bo 150, Tr 45 (each), Su 75.

Surface Features: cheap metal armor. Body: F PD5, DR45; R,L PD4, DR30; T,U,B PD4, DR20. Superstructure: F PD5, DR45; R,L PD4, DR30; T, B PD4, DR20. Tracks: PD4, DR20. Camouflage paint. Pin.

Vision: poor.

Details: headlights (SuF), hatches, ignition by hand crank, either internal or external.

Statistics: empty weight 6659.5, usual payload 598.5, loaded weight 7258 (3.63 tons). Total volume 99.59. Size modifier: +2. HT: 9. Price: \$9,569.

Ground Performance: Speed 26 mph. gAccel 2 mph/s. gDecel 20 mph/s. gMR 0,25. gSR: 3. Low GP. Off-Road Speed: 2/3.

Maintenance interval: 80 hours.

Starting with historical data and using the *GURPS Vehicles* formulas, one would end up with better performance than

historical. So the "Making lemons" (p. V198) rules have to be used because of poor vehicle design. This tankette has Hangar Queen (reducing the maintenance interval from 200 to 80 hours, much closer to the reality), Low mileage (increasing fuel consumption from 1.4 to 1.8 gph), Slow (reducing the calculated top speed from 29 to the historical value of 26 mph) Unstable (reducing SR from 4 to 3) and the new flaw Thin Tracks (increasing ground pressure from very low to low, and thereby reducing off-road speed to 2/3). All of these flaws are already factored in.

Statistics for the Fiat 8mm MG (remember the CV3/35 version has 2 of these weapons, linked):

Malf	Type	Damage	SS	Acc	1/2D	Max	Wt	RoF	Shots	Cost
16	Cr	6d	18	10	1,000	3,800	20	7	70	\$200

The weapons are fed from a reel (similar to a non-disintegrating belt) with 70 rounds. Changing reels requires the Gunner 3 seconds; the MGs are rather prone to malfunctions, which are almost always jams but of course involve just one of the barrels (see also pp. HT14, 15, 76, 77).

Starting the tankette requires 10 seconds of hand cranking. Roll against Driving or Mechanic. Penalties: -2 for using the internal, smaller hand crank, up to 4 for cold weather (see also p. HT94). It is suggested an optional 1 penalty for each point of ST below 10.

The hatches are hinged along their back edge. Therefore, they offer no cover if the crewmen have to bail out under enemy fire from the front. They do offer a bit of cover, if fixed in the upright position, to anybody crazy enough to travel outside the tankette, over the engine (see below).

So Where Do We Find That Tin Can?

The CV3/35 was exported in Afghanistan, Austria, Bolivia, Brazil, Bulgaria, China (where the Japanese captured a few of the 100 tankettes), Iraq, Spain and Hungary. Before WWII, it was employed in the Ethiopian war, the Spanish Civil war, the Chinese-Japanese war, the occupation of Albania, and in local accidents in South America. Note that some of the export versions had different MGs, but usually in the same or similar caliber (Madsens, for instance). Any government willing to spend its money in this questionable way, and not too disagreeable for the Italian Fascist regime of that time, could probably buy a stock.

Of course all of these areas could be where a 30s Special Ops team can find jobs, and these mercenaries could face the tankettes as a (dubious) asset or in the hands of their enemy. The Spanish Civil war, the "last crusade," is an especially intriguing and passionate setting for black-and-white Cliffhangers, but if the adventurers come from the United States they can also stop in South America. This would be the most likely continent where even a crime lord could boast a private army, and therefore a tank. China is the right place for a Martial Arts campaign, where Nationalist or Communist generals are actually regional warlords and love new war toys. And Time Travel, or alternate earths, can by definition bring you anywhere. Pulp-style Supers set in the 30s should face down a tank sooner or later in their careers. And what about Horror? The party travels to an exotic location to smite the Abomination Men Shall Not Put Up With. There they discover the local coven is too strong for them. Their guide tells them: "No you worry. My second cousin, he is sergeant on the barracks. You pay him well, he close his eyes while we borrow a tank...". And of course, just using the tankette against a horde of low-tech cultists isn't funny enough; let's see if the CV3/35 can survive the great Abomination itself!

The mercenaries might be hired by someone who already owns the tankettes. Or they could gain one as war booty. But it could also happen that they want to buy armor. Well, military surplus is always good business, and unscrupulous governments could sell their obsolete tanks, even as scrap metal, with no other precaution but removing the MGs. The tankette could also become the object of an adventure with a twist, especially in a *GURPS Espionage* campaign. The Rumanian government wants freelancers to investigate about their neighbors' top-secret arms deal. Will Hungary be buying advanced fighters? Revolutionary hollow-charge rocket weapons? The spies are in for a disappointing surprise; don't play this trick unless the players like realistic espionage!

So How Do We Handle That?

As said above, the CV3/35 isn't exactly mighty. It does have a morale effect, usually. For example, the PCs could be military advisors with the Ethiopian army. When the tankettes arrive, a dense cloud of dust will announce them, but instead of the usual sounds of horses, unknown, unnerving clanking noises will be heard. When the tankettes become visible, the tribal soldiers won't consider them as laughably puny tanks, but as giant, angular metal bugs, moving in fits and starts with sudden sharp turns. Once these things open fire, the soldiers will have to undergo a Fright Check.

Assuming the adventurers won't run, what can they do? The ideal weapon would be an anti-tank gun, even a very light one, or an AA gun such as a 20mm Oerlikon. A heavy MG, such as the classic Browning M2 .50 (p. HT122) is very useful, too; it's common, and easier to use than a AT gun. This MG was designed specifically to deal with tanks like the CV3/35. Failing these, a clever mercenary can try with his rifle. A 7.92mm round can't pierce the front armor, but it can do the trick if hitting any other side. A very good sniper could always aim for the vision slits. Rifle-fired grenades could work, but a direct hit would be needed.

But the true mark of heroes is the close assault. It is reported that these tankettes were surprisingly resistant to hand grenades . . . probably because many models of the time were concussion grenades, and poorly designed to boot. Of course, things would be different if the infantrymen could devise a way to make the explosive stick. Molotov cocktails can also be dangerous, since the vehicle isn't sealed. Also, legend has it that in Ethiopia, a squad of able-bodied braves managed to incapacitate a tankette, simply by overturning it! Of course this wouldn't be easy in any case, and it would be impossible if the vehicle was capable of moving. But against a bogged-down tankette it might work. The *GURPS* formula tells that, without Extra Effort, twelve ST 12 soldiers would be needed, with a running start and a fully coordinated action . . . or else use Extra Effort, and good luck! Finally, there are the tricks that only special persons could use. The warlord's Iron Dragon terrorized everyone in the region, until the mysterious Shaolin monk used his Breaking Blow and Power Blow skills (see pp. MA31, 33) to break open the hatch and drag the evil warlord out of his infernal machine.

A super needs a ST of 60 to lift the tankette (with Extra Effort, see p. S83).

And Now The Crew

A tank is really just a piece of junk, without its crew. Here are two *GURPS* NPCs for manning the tankette, one fictional and the other inspired by history (although romanticized).

Bob "Cranky" Jones

Maintenance expert

ST 11, DX 10, IQ 13, HT 10

Advantages: Double-Jointed, Gadgeteer, Strong Will +1

Disadvantages: Addiction (tobacco), Bad Temper, Delusion (minor, thinks engines have a will of their own), Duty (to employer), Secret (?)

Quirks: talks with machines, hates the CV3/35 tankettes

Main Skills: Armory(Vehicular Weaponry)-14, Driving(Tracked Vehicles)-13, Engineer(Vehicles)-19, Mechanic(Tracked Vehicles)-15, Scrounging-15

In 1929, Robert Jones was a promising engineer working for the U.S. Wheel Track Layer Co. of J.W. Christie, the leading American tank designer. He was absolutely brilliant, and rumor has it that the hybrid wheeled/tracked vehicle was actually his own idea. But then he had to leave the USA in a hurry, no one knows why. He accepted a series of consultancy contracts with third-world armies, but his difficult character (and Bad Temper) did not help him, and each job was slightly worse than the previous one. His current task should be to train Iraqi technicians and mechanics in the maintenance of a brand-new batch of CV3/35 tankettes. He already knew and despised the machines, and he isn't a

good teacher, but he had little choice. Unfortunately, he has discovered that most of the mechanics he should train can't tell a nut from a bolt, so while he angrily teaches them the basics, he also has to actually dirt his own hands if he wants to keep the damned things in running order. Being stationed in the midst of a desert, he thinks it's really time for a change.

GM's note: just replace the country name at will. Christie and his company are historical. Also note that Bob would be able, thanks to his skills and advantage (Gadgeteer) to redesign the engine or drivetrain, so that most of the above listed flaws could be removed; he could easily devise other improvements, such as fitting a heavier gun and/or a turret over the superstructure.

Captain Antonio Paladini

Tanker officer

ST 10, DX 11, IQ 11, HT 10

Advantages: Alertness +1, Charisma +1, Rank 4, Reputation +2 (decoration, knowledgeable people only, see p. SO49)

Disadvantages: Duty (to Army), Impulsiveness, Intolerance (communists), On the Edge, Reputation 3 ("he'll get us killed," tankers in his Army)

Quirks: loves hand grenades, sings while going to battle

Main Skills: Carousing-10, Driving(Tracked Vehicles)-9, Gunner(MG)-12, Guns(pistol)-13, Leadership-16, Tactics-14

In 1938, Capt. Paladini led a charge of his Italian tankette company inside the narrow streets of a Spanish village . . . the kind of terrain tankers should avoid. It was difficult for him to see the "Reds" who were firing from the buildings, through his small vision slits. He was also annoyed that the snipers disappeared before he could bring the MGs to bear. So he opened the hatch, climbed behind the superstructure, and from there he yelled directions to his driver and the accompanying infantrymen. Meanwhile he fired his pistol and threw hand grenades. He took the village and earned a medal. Originally coming from the Bersaglieri (light infantry), Paladini has flair and style, but he is way too rash and willing to take risks to be loved by his men. He's just a lukewarm fascist, but in Spain he has become an anti-Communist firebrand. Note his low Driving skill; he has half a point in it just because he's tried a few times, but he considers that a mechanic's menial task. He is an officer! And indeed, he's better at commanding the company than at firing his own MGs.

GM's note: Although inspired by history, he can represent a tanker officer in any army . . . somewhat haughty but bold and aggressive.

Suggested Reading

- *I Carri dell'Asse*, by Nicola Pignato, E. Albertelli Editore, 1983.
- *I Corazzati Italiani*, by Paolo Cazzani, Storia Illustrata, 1976.
- *Mezzi Corazzati e Blindati 1935-1939*, ed. by Nicola Pignato, Curcio, 1980.

When looking for the CV3/35, remember that, despite being basically the same model, it's been renamed several times and it may be known as: CV3, CV33, CV35, L3, L5.

http://www.shadowsfolly.com/wwii/Italy/L3_CV33_L5_CV35.htm

Pyramid Review

L1 -- Demons And Devils (for d20)

Published by Necromancer Games

Written by Bill Webb and Clark Peterson



Art by John Massé, Brian LeBlanc, and Conan Venus

\$8.95

Scenario anthologies are not a new idea. Chaosium have probably published the most for *Call of Cthulhu*, but various *Dungeons & Dragons* adventures have also been released in this format. Judges Guild led the way for the First Edition with titles such as *The Book of Ruins*. TSR also published several for the Second Edition, including *I13 - Adventure Pack 1* and *REF3, The Book of Lairs*. But until now, no publisher of adventures for *d20* has followed suit.

L1 -- Demons And Devils is the third scenario published by Necromancer Games and the first anthology for the *d20* system of adventures suitable for use with *Dungeons & Dragons*. It is a trilogy of adventures designed to run in one or two sessions, each as the culmination of a long quest for a particular mightily magical artifact guarded by either a demon or a devil. Each adventure already has an artifact to be found, but it is suggested that the DM is free to substitute his own. Each artifact is accompanied by the legend surrounding it, enabling easier working into an existing campaign. These are to be played by characters of at least 9th level and challenging enough for characters as high as 13th level. If the players are too attached to their characters to risk them upon any of these mini-adventures, Necromancer Games have made available a set of suitably high-level characters as a download from their web site, so that the adventures can be played as one-offs. This is indicative of this company's continued excellent support for their products via the Internet, and goes further for *Demons And Devils* with a set of free wilderness encounters to make these lairs difficult to get to.

Demons And Devils is another attractive book. John Massé's cover is very eye-catching. Inside Brian LeBlanc's interior artwork appears infrequently, but is rather good where it does. As with his previous efforts in *Rappan Athuk*, Conan Venus' maps still suffer from being too cramped. Here this not so much of a problem because each adventure has a pair of maps at most, but it would be nice to see maps with clarity in the future.

Before examining each adventure it should be noted that this being a Necromancer Games product, they do make use of their own *Creature Collection* book in the selection of monsters, but pleasingly, they keep this to a minimum, and do include the minimum necessary details here to make the adventures playable.

The first adventure is "The Sorcerer's Citadel," and is for 9th level and above characters. The Tower of Crane the Sorcerer contains a well-hidden Sphere of Annihilation. It is comprised of a simple tower with a sixteen-room dungeon below. This is the biggest and most traditional of the three adventures in the book. As the easiest of the three, its traps and puzzles are not as deadly as the second two.

"Ra's Evil Grin," the second scenario, is smaller and simpler without losing any of the lethality. Searching for an ancient religious artifact, The Globe of Arden, reputedly the left eye of the sun god, Arden himself, the party

(recommended minimum level for which is 11th) must travel to a lost island. On an island within that island lies the dungeon, which is thoroughly vicious, despite relying on only a few monster encounters, one of which is the Marilith or Type V Demon as depicted upon the cover. The rest is made up of a number of very deadly traps, which tend to kill rather than drain hit points.

For 13th level and above, "The Pit of Despair" is the final part of the trilogy. It is aimed squarely at a party that includes a paladin. Only those deemed most worthy and devout may be allowed to quest for the Temple of Justicars and thus find the fabled holy sword of Karith, a +5 Holy Avenger. Not only is this a very deadly dungeon by design, but utterly evil by intent. Every DM should enjoy running this one -- to say more would ruin some vicious surprises.

The three adventures in ***Demons And Devils*** are short, difficult and nasty. They are mini-adventures inspired the classic First Edition adventure by E. Gary Gygax, Tomb of Horrors and the authors do acknowledge this in confessing that this adventure is a personal favorite. If this is the kind of scenario that you need or are looking for, then those in ***Demons And Devils*** should fit the bill or indeed as a diverting set of puzzlers for when a break in the campaign is wanted.

--*Matthew Pook (With thanks to Roj at Wayland's Forge)*

Pyramid Reviews

Imperial Survey 3 & 4 (for Fading Suns RPG)

Imperial Survey: Hazat Fiefs

Written by Andrew Greenberg

Imperial Survey 4: Li Halan Fiefs

Written by Rustin Quaide

Published by [Holistic Design, Inc.](#)



32 pages each; \$6.95 each

These two slim volumes are the latest installments in Holistic Design's ongoing "Imperial Survey" series. Each book describes a handful of worlds for their *Fading Suns* science fiction roleplaying game. The unifying principle of these surveys is the noble house to which they owe allegiance. This is a nice approach as it kills two birds with one stone: detailing each planet, as well as fleshing out the major noble factions of the Known Worlds setting. In its latter role, the Imperial Surveys are also great props for the game. The Game Master could easily allow his players access to the description of each world, as a kind of in-game primer of the planet in question. That's because game information is kept to a minimum, allowing each GM to determine for themselves how best to employ the data in these books.

Physically, the latest volumes are much like their predecessors: 32 page staple-bound books with glossy color covers. The interior art is sparse, but generally well done. Both Alex Sheikman (in *Hazat Fiefs*) and John Bridges (in *Li Halan Fiefs*) do an excellent job of capturing the feel of their subject matter. Sheikman's dark but kinetic illustrations capture the spirit of the Iberian-inspired Hazat, while Bridges' softer and contemplative images recall Chinese brushwork - a perfect fit for the Asian Li Halan. Each world entry runs five to seven pages and includes a nice map of the world, complete with surface details like mountain ranges and settlements. The maps are quite useful in play too, providing just enough information to jumpstart the imagination of a beleaguered GM.

Hazat Fiefs describes four worlds in detail, along with a brief discussion of Hazat holdings in other parts of the Known Worlds. The worlds run the gamut from ancient Sutek (the first world humanity visited after discovery of the jump gates) to war-torn Hira. There's a lot of diversity within these worlds. I was especially pleased to see notes about the various factions and dynasties within the Hazat, as they create all sorts of plot hooks and opportunities for the GM to develop storylines. Because Hazat have dominion over only four worlds, the descriptions in their Imperial Survey volume are much more extensive than those volumes including more worlds. Happier still, the bulk of the additional space is devoted to the "People and Places" category, packing even more story hooks and characters into the book.

Li Halan Fiefs likewise describes only four worlds. These worlds have a great deal of thematic unity, focusing to

some extent on the religious and philosophical elements that are the hallmark of House Li Halan. Being of such a bent myself, I found this Imperial Survey volume particularly enjoyable. Like its predecessors, it provides lots of information usable in a *Fading Suns* campaign. More importantly (for me anyway) were the insights into the setting's syncretistic Universal Church of the Celestial Sun. Though clearly modeled on the medieval Catholic Church (with solid doses of Byzantium and a touch of Buddhism), the Universal Church has transcended pastiche and become an interesting creation in its own right. *Li Halan Fiefs* adds further pieces to that puzzle by focusing on some of the Asian elements of the faith. I was particularly taken with the illustration of the Church's founding Prophet as a bodhisattva - a nice touch that adds depth and diversity to the game.

Taken together, these two volumes nicely add to our understanding of the Known Worlds of Fading Suns. More importantly, they do so in a way that is fundamentally gameable. That is, they do not present reams of history and other minutiae. Instead, they focus on the information players and GMs alike need to run satisfying adventures. That's exactly what I want in a roleplaying supplement - an aid to my imagination. I rarely have difficulty coming up with the broad outlines of adventures or campaigns. What often eludes me are the little details that bring those outlines to life. The Imperial Survey series provides them in large quantities.

Equally important is that, like the rest of the *Fading Suns* line, these books paint a picture of a dynamic, living setting, one in which major events can and do happen. In that respect, they're no different than many other gaming supplements on the market today. Where they part company with the others is their ability to paint this picture without locking the GM into any single direction. There's very little expectation that a GM will pick up any one of the myriad story threads running through these books. Instead, each one is presented as an option - one among many - to be accepted or rejected according to the needs of a GM's ongoing campaign. In a way, they're "toolkits" more than supplements. In my experience, that's what GMs really want: something that's a spur to their own imagination rather than something that locks them into a plotline they didn't create. *Fading Suns* has been employing this approach for almost five years now. It's a shame it has garnered more recognition - or imitators - among the gaming industry.

-- James Maliszewski

Pyramid Pick

The Dying Earth Roleplaying Game

Published by [Pelgrane Press](#)

Written by **Robin D. Laws, with John Snead and Peter Freeman**



Hardback, 192 pages; \$29.95

Jack Vance is one of the most idiosyncratic and popular fantasy authors of the last forty years, and his many and varied worlds and settings have always seemed ripe for translation into RPG settings. But it is not until this year, with the release of both the upcoming [GURPS Planet Of Adventure](#), from Steve Jackson Games, and Pelgrane Press' new *Dying Earth Roleplaying Game* that there have been any licensed Vance products on the market. Pelgrane Press' game, designed by Robin Laws, is an impressive effort, with great pains made to enforce the peculiar nature of Vance's world.

The *Dying Earth* tales are set at the twilight days of our Earth, during the 21st Aeon -- an undefined, but very distant, time in the future. In this strange, ancient world is set the *Dying Earth Roleplaying Game* -- a world of powerful, capricious magicians, baroque customs, ravaging beasts, and callous cruelty. Vance's stories are atypical fantasy -- the protagonists are clever and resourceful, but also amoral and pragmatic; they are more likely to flee than fight. About half of Vance's *Dying Earth* stories are about Cugel the Clever, who is twice flung to distant shores by the whim of a magician, and must journey across strange lands to find his way home. Other tales concern the powerful -- and not-so-powerful -- magicians of the 21st Aeon, who seem as concerned with staving off ennui as they are with acquiring more potent magic.

The *Dying Earth Roleplaying Game* opens with a brief introduction to the game system and a simple example of play. Chapter two covers character generation, while the third through fifth chapters cover the basic rules of play. The remaining chapters follow a typical pattern, covering spells, equipment, player and GM tips, a guide to the game-world, some sample NPCs (many are characters from *Dying Earth* books), monsters, and an excellent sample adventure.

Characters in *Dying Earth* fall into one of three ranks, named for protagonists from Vance's tales. "Cugel"-level characters are the weakest: opportunistic rogues who may dabble in magic, but who by and large live by their wits (or, occasionally, their swords). Cugel-level characters explicitly begin the game broke and with only a few possessions. "Rhialto"-level characters, on the other hand, are the most powerful of magicians, commanding mighty entities from other planes, and with considerable material resources. Somewhere in between fall the "Turjan"-level characters -- capable magicians, and by no means destitute, but not of the same order as the Rhialto-level archmages. Within each rank, however, there are no further divisions; all characters of a given rank have access to the same range of abilities.

Dying Earth is unusual in that it lacks almost all of the conventional attributes most RPGs give to characters, such as "strength," or "intelligence." Instead, the five primary abilities are: Persuade, Rebuff, Attack, Defense, and Health. The first four of these will be further specified by a "style," denoting which particular kind of persuasion (etc.) the character prefers; each of the six Persuasion styles (such as "Eloquent" or "Glib") is countered, or "trumped," by one of the six Rebuff styles (such as "Wary" or "Obtuse"), and vice-versa. Trumping gives an advantage in opposed contests; the Attack and Defense styles trump each other in a similar manner.

Abilities are rated numerically, from 1 (abysmal) upwards, with ratings of 10 (for Cugel-level characters) through 20

(for Rhalto-level characters) considered excellent. *Dying Earth* uses this rating system for all aspects of a character, including skill-like abilities (such as "Pedantry" or "Living Rough"), possessions, financial resources, contacts, and capacities to resist temptation -- only in a Vancian setting would characters have a "Resist Pettfogger" ability, for which there is even an extended example in the rules.

The basic game mechanic is deceptively simple : players roll a single six-sided die. On a 1-3, their character fails at the task they were attempting. On a 4-6, they succeed. Players may always re-roll, but to do so costs them a point from the "pool" for the relevant ability. For example, a character with a Persuade rating of 10 could make a total of ten re-rolls on Persuasion attempts before their pool was exhausted. Rolls of 1 and 6 are particularly extreme, and can further deplete -- or partially refresh -- an ability pool. Opposed contests -- such as one character's Persuasion versus another's Rebuff -- continue until one of the participants cannot, or will not, re-roll a failure.

Once all of the points in a given ability pool are gone, the character is at a considerable disadvantage. Under certain circumstances, however, the pools refresh; exactly what these circumstances are varies from ability to ability, and there are some neat tricks to ensure game-balance. For example, a character with a Relationship ability has a powerful NPC he can call on for help -- until the pool for that ability is depleted. To refresh a Relationship pool, the PC must do some favor for the NPC in return -- a perfect plot hook for the GM. Other abilities may refresh through rest, study, meditation, or tending to one's estate.

Magic in *The Dying Earth Roleplaying Game* takes several forms. All characters have access to "cantraps" -- simple magical tweaks, such as minor blessings and curses. Any character who has learned the Magic ability may learn *Spells*, which are eclectic, but powerful, magical effects. Less-skilled practitioners ("dabblers") are less effective at learning and casting spells. Characters who have a sufficient Magic ability to be considered "Magicians" may create enchanted magical items using a fairly simple point system. The Enchantment rules aren't perfect, but the designers know it -- there are several suggestions for limiting abusive items. The most powerful "Arch-Magicians" may command the services of one or more "sandestins" -- almost omnipotent extradimensional beings. Sandestins do not serve willingly, however, and their servitude is regulated by a system of "indenture points", and is often subject to the magician's powers of persuasion.

Dying Earth goes to great lengths to establish the peculiar mood of Vance's books. The basic experience system rewards two things: turning up to play in a session, and uttering "taglines" at appropriate moments. The taglines are specific -- and characteristically Vancian -- pieces of dialogue that each player is given for the session; they range from the fairly flexible ("The prospect remains unpromising"), to the somewhat more specific ("I surmise you to be a noted wizard, seething with spells"). If a player can use the dialog in an entertaining and appropriate circumstance, they gain several experience points. If they use it in a mundane or inappropriate manner, they gain few or none. This is a neat device; it explicitly encourages all players to have the limelight at some stage in each session, and to engage in in-genre dialog. In the basic experience system, nothing is awarded for success, failure, conquest or discovery -- only the taglines matter. For those who don't care for the tagline system, a somewhat more conventional alternative is provided; it does, however, reward dramatic failure to the same degree it rewards dramatic success.

The changing fates of the protagonists is one of the characteristically Vancian features that *Dying Earth* emphasizes. Several other such features -- including elements as "Crafty Swindles," "Casual Cruelty," and "Foppish Apparel" -- are conveniently discussed at length in the chapter on GM advice. This is helpful not only for general adventure design, but as a primer to the mood of Vance's world for those not already familiar with it. GMs are encouraged to include as many of these elements in an adventure as possible; for reference, the sample adventure discusses which elements it employs, and which it passes over.

The rules themselves are written in what strives to be a Vancian style; for the most part, they succeed without being clumsy or opaque. There are plenty of illustrative examples, both of actual game mechanics, and of mood, setting, and themes. The language used is entertaining -- where else would you find an "Overarching Rule of Efficacious Blandishment" -- and many pages have pithy quotes from Vance in one corner. The chapters which discuss the lands and creatures of the Dying Earth give a fairly complete picture of the setting, but players and GMs who haven't read any of the *Dying Earth* might still feel a little lost -- accomplished though the writing in the *Dying Earth Roleplaying Game* is, it's not really a substitute for reading one or two of Vance's books to get a feel for the setting. All in all, it's

still a very entertaining book to read, and, perhaps more importantly, it's an intelligently designed game which offers some unconventional role-playing opportunities.

Gamers who are fans of Vance's work and enjoy games that favor interaction over combat will certainly want to look at *The Dying Earth Roleplaying Game*; in fact, there's probably something in it for anyone who can stand to go a few sessions without a rousing fight.

Copies of *The Dying Earth Roleplaying Game* purchased from Pelgrane's website also include the first issue of *The Excellent Prismatic Spray*, a bi-monthly magazine published in support of the game.

-- Mark Cogan



by Ralph Dula

Salt Lake City, the capital of the Mormon nation, is known as the most technologically advanced city in the world, courtesy of the vast collection of mad scientists that reside there. However, only a few people know that it is also the home of Percy Sitgreaves, the first man to combine the mystical skills of the huckster with the otherworldly knowledge used by mad scientists, a mixture Sitgreaves has named Thaumaturgical Diffusion. As discussed in *City Of Gloom*, Sitgreaves has combined the two arts to create a whole new class of huckster magic, one he attempted to share with the world in Autumn of 1876, hiding his mystical knowledge in the pages of a Smith & Robards catalog he published.

It has been more than a year since that catalog was released, and in that time many hucksters have deciphered Sitgreaves' hidden message, and using that knowledge have created hexes of their own that combine mad science and hexslinging. What follows are six new hexes created based on Sitgreaves' work.

Crystalline Sheen

Trait: Smarts

Hand: 1

Speed: 2

Duration: 5 rounds/hex level

Range: Self

Percy Sitgreaves created a useful hex called Bulletproof, allowing a huckster to literally grow armor. Unfortunately, while providing excellent protection, the mystical transformation greatly reduced the nimbleness of the huckster, making it harder to defend against enemies. Christina DeRose, a huckster and mad scientist who studied the science of geology, created the Crystalline Sheen hex as an alternate means of defense, inspired by the way several of her crystal and rock specimens caught and reflected light.

Crystalline Sheen causes a physical transformation in the caster's skin, causing the huckster's entire body to be covered in a semi-transparent crystalline substance. The altered flesh catches any light that strikes it, magnifying it tenfold as it reflects the illumination, making it painful to look at the huckster. The Target Number for any attack against the huckster is increased by one, plus one for each hand above the minimum the caster gets, as the attacker is unable to focus his vision upon the huckster without suffering incredible pain.

If there is very little light in the area (less than that found at twilight) than the hex provides no benefit, except making the caster look inhuman. Additionally, abominations which do not use vision to find their prey are unaffected by this hex.

Fusion

Trait: Smarts
Hand: Jacks
Speed: 2
Duration: 1 round/hex level
Range: 10 yards

The huckster who created the Fusion hex was something of a bookworm, reading any scientific text that he could get his paws on. In a text on metallurgy he came upon the term fusion, which the book defined as "The merging together of objects via heat." Having been robbed at gunpoint the day before, the huckster was inspired to create this hex, to deal with anyone else who waved a gun in his face.

Casting this hex upon a gun-toting individual causes a feeling of intense heat to rush over the victim, followed by the weapon he is holding merging into his hand, with no way of removing it before the hex expires! While no permanent damage is done by this hex, the victim is in extreme pain for the entire time it lasts, having a +1 added to the Target Number of any action he attempts, with an additional +1 for every hand the huckster got over the minimum. Needless to say, the merging of man and machine makes the victim unable to use his gun (or his hand) for the hex's duration. At the Marshal's discretion, the victim of Fusion might have to make a Guts check (TN 7) due to the shock of having his body temporarily mutated.

Once the hex is over the gun detaches from its bearer, with neither suffering any permanent damage, though a gunslinger might be a bit leery of picking up his piece again. Note that this hex affects only firearms, so casting it upon a knife or club-wielding foe is just a waste a time and a risk of backlash. Also, the hex only affects one gun per casting, so a fellow with a gun in each hand can still blaze away with one while the hex affects the other.

Iron In Your Blood

Trait: Smarts
Hand: Pair
Speed: 1
Duration: Instant
Range: 5 yards/hex level

This hex was created by one of the few hucksters who also studied the mad science art of alchemy. In her studies of the human body she learned that minute traces of iron can be found in the blood of humans and animals. Always looking for ways to drum up business she created this hex, convincing those she used it on that they had suffered a poisoning or heart attack, and making a tidy sum selling them her elixirs to cure the damage she had caused.

Casting this spell upon a person causes the iron in a person's bloodstream to grow for a brief second, blocking the flow of blood and putting incredible pressure on the victim's arteries, before shrinking down to normal. Naturally this is very painful, inflicting 1d6 Wind, +1d6 for every hand gotten over the minimum. Unlike many damage-causing hexes, there is no visible magical energy streaking from the huckster to the victim, nor is there external signs of injury; a well-concealed huckster can use this spell to wear down a target with the victim never having a clue as to the source of his injury.

Note that abominations do not have blood as normal creatures do, and so are immune to this hex, as are Harrowed.

Lead Feet

Trait: Spirit
Hand: Pair
Speed: 1
Duration: 1 round/hex level
Range: 5 yards/hex level

Sometimes you have to make a hasty exit after being accused of cheating at cards or consorting with the devil. This hex allows a huckster to slow down the Heel-Toe Express of his opposition, giving him a chance to escape.

The target of this hex literally finds his feet and legs have turned into supernaturally heavy lead, reducing his speed dramatically. Base success with this hex increases the level of load the victim is carrying by one step, with every hand above the minimum increasing the load level by one, as per the "Carrying a Load" table in the Deadlands rulebook. If this takes a character's load level above Heavy he cannot move until the hex is over, his legs now literally too heavy for him to move.

Note that while a victim may not be able to pursue the huckster until the effects of the hex is over, his hands and mind will be working as normal, allowing him to shoot, throw things, or even cast magic. Also, the victim of this hex suffers no actual damage, his legs returning to normal at the end of the hex none the worse for wear.

Lead Poisoning

Trait: Knowledge

Hand: Pair

Speed: 2

Duration: 2 rounds/hex level

Range: Touch

Some hucksters realize that displays of their mystical talents in public will eventually get them strung up with a hemp necktie. Those same hucksters also realize that sometimes using their talents in public is the only way to keep their fat out of the fire. Lead Poisoning is a hex designed to give hucksters an edge in combat without letting everyone know they have powers beyond those of normal men.

The huckster casts this spell upon a loaded gun, infusing a manitou within each bullet in the firearm for the duration of the hex. When one of the bullets strikes a target the manitou becomes active, causing the round to break apart inside the target and sending its fragments to burrow through the victim's body, causing an additional +1d4 damage, +1d4 for every two hands gotten over the minimum during casting. Several hucksters using this hex have astonished onlookers with the amount of damage they have inflicted with a simple derringer.

While the hex is active the bullets are considered to be magical weapons, meaning they affect abominations immune to mundane weapons just fine. Also note that only the bullets that are in the gun when the hex is cast are enchanted, so if a huckster fires off a few rounds from a gun upon which Lead Poisoning is cast and stops to reload while the hex is still active, the newly loaded rounds will not be enchanted, unless the huckster decides to cast Lead Poisoning again.

Steel Grip

Trait: Smarts

Hand: Pair

Speed: 2

Duration: 1 minute/hex level

Range: Self

Steel Grip transforms a huckster's hands, making them into metallic talons with razor-sharp edges. Base success with this hex increases the huckster's Strength by one step, +1 step for each hand above the minimum the huckster gets, but this bonus to Strength only applies to doing damage in Brawlin' combat. This damage is considered lethal damage, as per the rules on Brawlin'. Additionally, the huckster receives a bonus to his Climbin' Aptitude equal to the increase in Strength. This reflects the talons' ability to punch through material to create handholds while climbing. This does leave an easily-followed trail of vast holes, however, so this hex is not recommended who wish to keep their vertical travels a secret.



Stoicism, by Sigismondo filius Vittoria, Follower of Tremere

God is order. No more need be said amongst intelligent people, but you are my apprentice and thus a mindless animal, forcing me to squander my time explaining further.

Both Aristotelians and Platonists misunderstand the nature of God, and their views of the world and how we should live in it are tainted. God is not some transcendent deity, nor is He an all-seeing philosopher perched at the top of creation. God is the principle that organizes the universe. God is Logos, reason, the order of the universe.

Stoic Logic and Physics

All knowledge comes to the soul from the body's senses. Can anything be more obvious? Platonists say our senses lie to us. Aristotelians say that rational thought supersedes vulgar observations. Can anything be more incongruous with the facts of life? We are born empty babes, filled with knowledge by our betters (whose wisdom of course must enter through the eyes and ears) until we possess sufficient faculty to learn from our own observations.

If knowledge comes from our senses, how can we distinguish truth from dreams, illusions, or the imagination? Certainly Plato's Forms cannot help us, and neither can Aristotle's dry, analytical metaphysics. Both are the product of contemplation and thought. But thoughts come from within the mind, and everything within the mind once came from the outside by way of the senses. Therefore, thoughts are products of our senses, nothing more, and cannot help us differentiate between true and false sensations, or between knowledge and lies.

Truth cannot be found in thought, only in feeling. Real objects, real observations, invoke within us intense conviction that they actually exist. True sensations, and therefore "true knowledge," convince us of their existence. This is the Gift: the ability to tell dream from real, fact from fiction, with the tugging of the heart.

What does your heart tell you about physics? Two basic things: only matter exists, and reason governs the world. The soul, despite Christian ramblings on the incorporeal world, must be made of matter. The body and the soul work in tandem: the senses of the body produce thoughts in the soul, and the thoughts of the soul produce motion and actions in the body. The body and soul, therefore, must be made of the same substance. The same can be said of the world and God. But what element, what physical substance, could possibly comprise the soul, the thoughts within our minds, and even God Himself?

Fire, the element of reason.

The world began in primal, divine fire, the other elements brought out of fire by God's will. The Divine fire suffuses the world; thus the world and God are one and the same. The human soul, a spark of the Divine, suffuses the body; thus the soul and body are one and the same. Because God suffuses the world, every object in it has a purpose, and exists in an ordered, harmonious design.

This impression-the Divine flame burning in all things, bringing order and purpose to everything that ever happens-is so beautiful it has to be true.

Stoic Ethics

Live according to nature.

The absolute law of Logos governs the universe; human nature is no exception. The virtuous man acts rationally as his place in the universe dictates. Perhaps you have heard Aristotelians and Platonists claim the same thing? They possess a sloppiness of thought I will burn out of you. A stoic strives to live a life free of passion. Plato and Aristotle falsely believed that passions had their place in human nature and life. All passions are vice. All rational actions, no matter how severe, are virtuous.

Virtue, founded upon reason, stems from knowledge. The greatest virtue, therefore, is wisdom, not as an end to itself, but as the prerequisite of living morally. Wisdom comes from the study and application of logic and physics. From wisdom comes insight, bravery, self-control, and justice.

Only two moral states exist: wise and foolish. The wise possess perfect virtue. Fools wallow in absolute evil. No intervening state exists. People are either divine or worthless.

I, as a master magus, am divine. You, as apprentice, are worthless. When you pass your Gauntlet, you too shall become one of the wise, a rare beacon of godly light in the ever growing miasma of mortal evil.

Commentary

The Stoic school lasted for 500 years. Stoic influences can be seen in the Christian notions of salvation and divine providence. Its founder, Zeno (circa 336-264 BC), not the same Zeno of "Zeno's Paradox," combined Socratic thought with the theories of Diogenes and Cynicism to argue that virtue did not originate in the external world, but resided instead in self-sufficiency and rational, mental discipline. Thus, one's fortune in life (wealth or poverty, honor or shame) played no role in "the good life." Later Hellenistic Stoics fleshed out the stoic doctrines of logic, epistemology, and cosmology.

The writings of Epictetus (c. 50-138 BC), the Roman developer of the ethics and theology of Stoicism, were widely read by early Christians and influenced the inception of Christian morality. Epictetus codified the practical side of stoicism. To gain wisdom, Epictetus taught, you must first recognize which aspects of life are under your control, and which aspects you are powerless to affect. Then, to live a virtuous life, you must control things that are within your power to change (desire, belief, and judgment) and disregard the inevitable (the appreciation of social status, the accumulation or loss of possessions, health and appearance, and even death).

The Stoic

The stoic sees the entire universe a single, magical machine. Humans can understand the machine and participate in its operation, but can never change its destiny. A stoic does not despair or struggle against fate.

A stoic's strict sense of morality stems from this principle. "Evil" is ignorance of the universe's workings, the ignorance of magic and actions wasted on false ideas. "Good" is knowledge and practice of magic.

Suggested Mystae Virtues: Ars Notoria +3, Augury +3, Celestial Magic +2, Hermetic Astrology +1, Hermetic Theurgy +1, Magical Imagination +1

Suggested Hermetic Virtues: Affinity with Creo +4, Affinity with Ignem +3, Cyclic Magic (stellar), Deft Art (Intéllego) +1, Elementalism +5, Penetration Mastery +1

Suggested General Virtues: Destiny +4, Divination +4, Higher Purpose +1, Strong Personality +1, Strong Willed +1

Suggested Flaws: Cyclic Magic (stellar), Incompatible Arts (Perdo Ignem) -1, Overconfident -2, Oversensitive (the uneducated) -1, Sense of Doom -3, Tormenting Master -1

Suggested Abilities: Certamen, Concentration, Disputatio, Enigmatic Wisdom, Finesse, Hermetic Law, Leadership, Lectio, Philosophiae

Suggested Arts: Creo, Intellego, Ignem, and Imaginem

Suggested Spells: Any Ignem and Imaginem spell, especially Intellego Ignem.

Bjornaer: The Gift allows members of our house to do something no one else can: unlock our heart-beasts. Others think we waste our time in the wilds-but to ignore our power would be a crime!

Bonisagus: Those who try to break the limits of magic are fools; their wicked efforts will bring ruin to our house. Learn what can be learned, and leave the unthinkable to the mundanes.

Criamon: The Enigma is obvious-it shines out of every thing. You are simply too dim to see it.

Ex Miscellenea: Our diverse house does more good than the rest of the Order combined. Our many traditions pursue every aspect of human endeavor.

Flambeau: Fire burns. Nothing more need be said to the truly wise. (What does that -- and this very question -- say about what I think of you?)

Guernicus: All true law is Natural Law. Justice is inevitable as death.

Jerbiton: Too many of our house are awash with angst and possessed with poseur. Do not write poems about life; live it.

Mercere: Our founder was the ideal stoic: when he lost his Gift, he accepted his loss, served the Order in the best way he could, and became a greater light than any other Founder.

Merinita: Surrender to faerie. They are the superiors.

Tremere: Certamen shows us who shall have power, and those who never will.

Tytalus: Our games reveal our fates.

Verditius: Like the ants and bees, humanity was born to build. Artifice is the one true good.

Stoic Mystic Companion

Stoic Template

Starting Abilities: Artes Liberales 3, Awareness 5, Concentration 3, Divination 3, Leadership 2, Philosophiae 3

Starting Experience Points: 10 + age

Starting Virtues at No Cost: Keen Vision +1, Divination +4

Stoic Understanding

Stoics claim their powers comes from clarity of vision-actual, physical vision, not spiritual insight. By adopting the fatalist understanding of the ancient stoics (represented by the Sense of Doom Flaw), a stoic's eyes can see far and clear into the Fire that is the universe. This sight gives a stoic the following abilities:

- **Meditation:** For every 15 minutes spent in mediation of the cosmic fire, you can add your Concentration score to any one roll of your choosing until the next sunrise. For example, by spending 45 minutes in meditation, you may add you concentration to any 3 rolls that you make before the next sunrise. The maximum number of rolls you can boost with Concentration per day equals you Per + Concentration + aura of the area in which you meditated.
- **Seeing:** In addition to the normal uses of Divination, you can cast any Intéllego spell with a duration of Momentary or Concentration by rolling a stress die + Per + Divination + Awareness + aura total greater or than equal to the spell's level of effect. All stoic Intéllego spell effects have a range of Sight without changing the original effect level of the spell. For example, a stoic can cast Converse with Plant and Tree (normally at range Touch with an effect level of 25) at a range of Sight with an effect level of 25. Such spell effects take one round to cast, and cost one Fatigue level.

You may perform Intéllego spell effects with durations greater than Concentration, but doing so costs 1 pawn of vis per magnitude, increases casting time to 15 minutes of meditation per magnitude, and costs two Fatigue levels. You can also cast Intéllego rituals or Intéllego spell effects at Arcane Connection range this way, but doing so costs 3 Fatigue levels.

- **Portent:** You can cast geasa upon someone, as per the guidelines in Lion of the North, page 104. Your formula to cast a geas is: stress die + Per + Divination + Concentration. According to the stoics, they do not actually "cast" geas, they merely "see" what fate lies before you.

Autocannons For GURPS



"Get one today, because the guy you meet tomorrow may already have one!"

-- Uncle Albert's™ Auto Stop & Gunnery Shop, 2035 Catalog

GURPS High-Tech thoroughly covers most types of small arms and also includes a fair number of support weapons. One class of weapons is absent, however: the automatic cannon. Most of these are vehicular armaments and are thus included to a certain extent in **GURPS Vehicles**. But the scope of the latter is very different from that of HT: It is designed to provide generic game stats only, in contrast to HT, which strives to represent specific weapons and also tries to enlighten the reader on the weapons' service histories and interesting details. Some autocannons would fit nicely into HT, and indeed some are mentioned in various chapters, but eventually the whole class was left out because of space constraints.

This article has 25 autocannon entries HT-style, that is with a lot of real-world information. Game statistics are of course also here, based on what VE has to say about the topic. However, the weapons were *not* reverse-engineered using the rules, instead most of the data was taken directly from reference works wherever possible. Nevertheless, all are fully compatible with VE.

* * *

Autocannons are defined here as fully automatic weapons with a caliber of 20mm or larger.

Rotary autocannons are multi-barrel weapons often powered by an electric, hydraulic or pneumatic motor, resulting in increased rate of fire (the Russian 23x115mm Izhmash GSh-6-23M has RoF 150!) and high reliability (several 10,000 shots between failure). They are often called *Gatling cannons* after the hand-cranked multi-barrel gun invented by Dr. Richard Gatling. Many self-powered rotary cannons also exist (almost all Russian designs are gas-operated). Most rotary weapons are based on the first such weapon that reached service, the U.S. M61 *Vulcan*. One drawback of rotary cannons is their spin-up time, that is, they require a split second to reach their selected rate of fire. Thus, 1-second bursts or the first second of a longer burst consist only of about 70% of the noted RoF.

Externally powered autocannons are single-barreled guns powered by an external motor. The most prominent examples are members of the *Chain Gun*-family, where the action is driven by an internal chain-mechanism. However, there are also other motor-driven weapons. All externally powered guns have a high reliability.

Revolver cannons, originally invented in Germany during WWII, are single-barreled guns with several chambers not unlike a hand-held revolver. This arrangement provides higher rates of fire while allowing for a compact, lightweight and reliable weapon. Revolver cannons can also be found with motor-driven actions.

All belt-fed autocannons up to mid TL7 were single-feed only, which meant they were often loaded with a mix of ammo types on a single belt. For example, German fighters with the MG151/20 fired a 1:1:1 mix of SAPHEC-SD, SAPHE-SD and APEX-SD. This was usually neither economical nor very effective. In the mid-1960s, the double-feeder was invented, and common on ground service guns by the 1970s. A cannon equipped with it can feed ammunition from either side, so that the gunner can choose between two different types, as need arises. Some of the most recent guns even have triple-feeders. This is generally not available for rotary and revolver guns (although possible and already proposed for certain anti-aircraft applications), which therefore today mostly fire multi-purpose rounds such as SAPHE, HEDP or FAPDS.

Note that autocannon projectiles are almost universally fitted with a tracer (e.g. HE-T, APFSDSDU-T). See *Walking the Burst*, p. HT78. In keeping with VE, this is not noted in the weapon chart. Most autocannon projectiles are highly volatile and will count as flame attack (p. VE183), including SAPLE, SAPHE, SAPHEC, HE, HEDP, AHEAD, FAPDS, API, APEX, APDU, APDSDU and APFSDSDU. Weapons mounted in aircraft (including helicopters) can *not* use sabot rounds. The sabots pose a distinct danger for jet engines and propellers. The same guns used in ground or naval applications are of course not restricted by this.

Most modern autocannons, especially for use in or against aircraft, have dual firing rates, a lower one against ground targets and a higher one against airborne targets. Note that many autocannons are incapable of single shots. Most TL7 weapons have burst limiters included in their fire control systems, which help conserve ammunition.

Maxim QF 1-pdr Mk I, 37x94mmR Hotchkiss, UK, 1889

By definition, this was the first autocannon ever. The British water-cooled Maxim machine gun (pp. HT117-118) was scaled up to fire the same 1-pound blackpowder shell as the Hotchkiss Mle 1877 mechanical rotary gun (p. HT117). It was originally intended for use against torpedo boats. The Maxim was first adopted by a number of naval forces, including the British (1889) and Imperial German (1897), and also the French and about 30 others. Germany made it under license. It was nicknamed the *Pom-Pom* during the Anglo-Boer War in South Africa, where both sides used it. German Navy guns also saw land service during the Chinese Boxer revolt, and many were still in service in WWI, when the British Army and Navy, among others, used it as an anti-balloon gun on horse-drawn field carriages and armored cars. It was adopted by the Imperial German Army in 1915, which found it useful against early tanks. The *Pom-Pom* had a short barrel and fed from a non-disintegrating 25-round belt. The Germans also used 50-round and 100-round belts. It was manually aimed and fired. During WWI, APEX and SAPHE rounds were introduced by some nations.

Becker Kanone, 20x70mmRB Becker, Germany, 1917

The first light autocannon, this gun was patented in 1914. It was a simple blowback weapon, used as the flexible Becker FlzK on heavy aircraft. Mounted on a tripod (60 lbs.) it was called the Becker TAK and employed against tanks and aircraft. It was manually controlled, had a medium barrel and fed from a top-mounted 12-round box magazine. The gun was only used by the Germans during WWI.

The Becker FlzK was mounted on some AEG G IV bombers and Albatros J I close-support aircraft.

Oerlikon S, 20x110mmRB Oerlikon, Switzerland, 1927

The Oerlikon S cannon was a gradual development of the Becker gun, the patents having been sold to the Swiss company. During the late 1930s an improved variant, the SS (1938), was widely adopted as an anti-aircraft gun, mounted on tripods, trailers and especially ships; RoF 8. All models usually fed from a 60-round drum, which weighed 62 lbs. loaded. Among the Oerlikon users were Japan and the USSR, but the main operators of the SS were Britain and the USA. Hundreds of thousands were made.

The far less successful Oerlikon FFS (1935) was an aircraft weapon; use the same stats except for Ewt 86, RoF 7. Hispano-Suiza located near Paris produced a licensed copy of the FFS called the HS.7; Ewt 103, RoF 6.

The French Dewoitine D.501 fighter (1935) had a single HS.7 gun with a 60-round drum, firing through the propeller hub.

In 1936 Hispano-Suiza came out with their own development, the HS.404, which became the main competitor of the Oerlikon. Although a completely different design, it was very similar operationally and both widely exported and license-made. It used the 20x110mm Hispano-Suiza cartridge, which was *not* interchangeable with the Oerlikon round. During WWII it was mainly employed as an aircraft gun. The original HS.404 usually fed from a 60-round drum, but by 1941 improved British and U.S. aircraft versions used disintegrating belts. The company introduced their own belt-

feed model, the HS.804, shortly after WWII. Use the Oerlikon S stats, except for Ewt 105-121, RoF 8 (drum-feed HS.404); Ewt 114, RoF 13 (belt-feed HS.804); Ewt 95, RoF 10 (drum-feed British Mk II); Ewt 92, RoF 12 (belt-feed British Mk V); Ewt 112, RoF 10 (belt-feed U.S. M2); Ewt 95, RoF 13 (belt-feed U.S. M3) and Ewt 90, RoF 13 (belt-feed U.S. M24).

The Royal Air Force Supermarine *Spitfire Mk IB* fighter (1939) had two Mk II guns in the wings with 60 rounds per gun, the Hawker *Hurricane Mk IIC* fighter (1940) had four Mk II guns in the wings with 60 rounds per gun (p. HT89), the U.S. Army Air Corps Lockheed P-38F *Lightning* fighter (1942) had one M2 cannon with 150 belted rounds, the U.S. Navy Grumman F8F-1B *Bearcat* fighter (1945) had four M3 guns in the wings with 200 belted rounds each (p. HT91), the U.S. Navy North American F-1C *Sabre* fighter (1953) had four M24 guns in the nose with 132 belted rounds per gun and the Argentine FMA IA-58B *Pucará* ground attack fighter (1975) mounted two HS.804 guns with 270 belted rounds per gun (p. SO15).

During the 1960s, the U.S. Navy converted thousands of M3 guns to the MK16 MOD 0 deck gun; use the same stats, except for Ewt 95, RoF 10.

The LCM(R) *Monitor* riverine boats (1963) mounted one MK16 MOD 0 with 365 rounds in the aft turret.

The German Ikaria MG-FF (1936) was a modified variant of another Oerlikon model, the FFF, which very much resembled the original Becker gun. It was a compact weapon with medium barrel and fired the 20x80mmRB round; Dam 5dx2(0.5) plus 1d-4[2d], 1/2D 1,000, Max 4,800, Ewt 62, RoF 9, WPS 0.44. It usually fed from a 30-round or 60-round drum. API and APEX rounds were available, but the modified MG-FF/M (1940) mainly fired SAPHEC rounds.

The Messerschmidt Bf 109E-4 fighter (1940) mounted one MG-FF/M in each wing with 60 rounds per gun. The Heinkel He 111H-16 transport (1941) mounted one flexible MG-FF/M in the nose with 30 ready rounds and 5 spare drums.

Bofors m/36, 40x311mmR Bofors, Sweden, 1936

This Swedish anti-aircraft gun was designed beginning in 1928 and became a huge success during the 1930s and 1940s. More than 20 nations adopted it in that era in widely varying numbers, among them Argentina, Finland and Turkey, and many more after WWII. The basic gun was license-made in Austria, Belgium, Canada, Czechoslovakia, Great Britain, Hungary, Norway, Poland and the USA. After WWII, it was also made in Germany and Italy. It was used both on ground and naval mounts, including trains and submarines, and often found in twin or quadruple installations. The Bofors fed from 4-round clips, although bulky feeders holding 10, or after WWII up to 101, rounds were developed and used by some nations (but usually confined to naval applications).

The Swedish Army Lvakan m/36 and its copies were the most widespread ground mounts. They had a single gun on a four-wheeled trailer. Some 24 rounds would be stowed on the trailer right beside the gun, with about 200 more on the towing truck. Such an anti-aircraft mount would mass around 2.5 tons. The Cadillac M42 *Duster* self-propelled armored anti-aircraft system (1951) of the U.S. Army carried two license-made Watervliet M2A1 guns in an open turret with 480 stowed rounds.

The U.S. Navy mounted a single MK3 on the LCT landing ships (1940), while the Vietnam-era LCM(R) *Monitor* riverine craft (1963) mounted a MK52 in the bow turret, fed by a 48-round drum.

The U.S. Air Force's Rockwell AC-130U *Pave Spectre III* gunship (1994) carried a side-firing M2A1 gun with shortened barrel and 276 stowed rounds (p. SO89).

After WWII, the gun was commonly known as the L60 (although its barrel length actually was 56 calibers), to distinguish it from the improved L70 or m/48, which fired the more powerful 40x365mmR cartridge; Dam 6dx7(0.5) plus 4d[4d], 1/2D 5,000, Max 13,700, Ewt 770, RoF 5*, WPS 5.5.

Mauser MG151/20, 20x82mm Mauser, Germany, 1940

An improved version of the 15x96mm Mauser MG151 heavy machine gun, which was modified to accept a more effective cartridge by simply replacing the barrel. It was one of the first guns to fire electrically primed ammunition and was a standard light cannon of many German, Italian and some Japanese and Romanian aircraft, mainly in fixed mounts. Later in the war it was also used on single and triple anti-aircraft mounts and even improvised ground tripods and naval fast attack boats. After WWII it was used for some time by Czechoslovakia, France, Israel and South Africa, France even producing it until 1970. The MG151/20 used a disintegrating belt.

The Junkers Ju 87D-5 STUKA ground attack aircraft (1940) had one gun with 180 rounds in each wing. The Messerschmidt Bf 109G-5 fighter (1942) had a single gun with 200 rounds firing through the propeller hub. The Focke-Wulf Fw 190A-8 fighter (1940) had four wing-mounted guns, two synchronized in the wingroots with 250 rounds each and two unsynchronized with 140 rounds. The Japanese Kawasaki Ki-61-Ia *Hien* (*Tony*) fighter (1942) mounted one in each wing, with 120 rounds per gun. Some French Aérospatiale SA 316B *Alouette III* helicopters (1960) mounted a MG151/20 with 480 rounds (p. SO86).

The South African Vektor GA-1 *Rattler* (1989) was a slightly modernized copy; use the same stats except for Ewt 86. By installing a few replacement parts, it could be converted in 10 minutes to fire the 12.7x99mm Browning (Dam 12d, 1/2D 1,500, Max 6,800, RoF 10, WPS 0.25). It was available on armored vehicle, aircraft and naval mountings.

The Atlas *Oryx* helicopter (1991), a derivative of the Aérospatiale SA330L *Puma* (p. SO86), could mount one GA-1 as door gun with 240 ready rounds.

Tulamash VYa-23, 23x152mmB Volkov-Yartsyev, USSR, 1940

The most powerful small caliber autocannon of WWII was an aircraft weapon for ground attack. It was scaled up from the 12.7x108mm Beresin UBK heavy machine gun and had a long barrel.

The Lavochkin-Gorbunov-Gudkov LaGG-3 Tip 8 fighter (1941) had a single gun firing through the propeller hub, with 80 rounds. The Ilyushin Il-2M Tip 3 *Shturmovik* ground attack aircraft (1942) had a VYa-23 with 250-round belt in each wing.

The Tulamash AZP-23 (2A7) was a later development installed on the ZSU-23-4. It used the same cartridge case as the VYa-23, but ammunition was not interchangeable; use the same stats except for Ewt 176, RoF 15.

The ZSU-23-4 *Shilka* armored anti-aircraft vehicle (1966) mounted four AZP-23 guns with 500 ready rounds each.

Rheinmetall-Borsig BK3.7, 37x265mmR Rheinmetall, Germany, 1942

This aircraft gun was based on the FlaK18 anti-aircraft gun of the 1930s. It was used both as an heavy aircraft destroyer and tankbuster. It fed from 6-round clips inserted from the side. The APCR round introduced in 1944 was in short supply because of severe lack of tungsten.

The Junkers Ju 87G-1 *Kanonenvogel* ground attack aircraft (1943) carried two guns with 12 rounds per gun below the wings, while the Henschel Hs 129B-2/Wa heavy fighter (1943) carried one as a belly gun with 6 rounds ready to use, plus 66 in reserve.

Rheinmetall-Borsig MK108, 30x90mmRB Rheinmetall, Germany, 1943

A cheap, lightweight gun designed for air-to-air combat, the shells carrying enough explosive to bring down even heavy Allied bombers, although its short range was a distinctive drawback (pilots usually opening fire at 300 yards). The action was scaled up from the old Becker. The MK108 was extremely compact and had a short barrel. It used electrically primed ammunition in disintegrating belts.

The Messerschmidt Bf 109K-4 fighter (1944) had one gun firing through the propeller hub with 60 rounds, while the Messerschmidt Me 262A-1 *Schwalbe* jet fighter (1944) had four nose guns, two with 100 rounds each and two with 80 rounds each.

Mauser MK213, 30x85mmB Mauser, Germany, 1945

This revolutionary gun was the first revolver cannon, with five chambers and a medium barrel. Its high rate of fire, good reliability and effective *Minengeschoß* completely outclassed all Allied weapons of the time. In our reality, only 15 prototypes were made before the war ended, but had it continued as postulated in *Alternate Earths*, the MK213 would have become the new standard gun of the *Luftwaffe*.

The Messerschmidt Me 262F-1 jet fighter (1946) had two guns with 120 rounds per gun, while the Horten Ho 15A-1 flying wing jet fighter (1946) had two guns with 150 rounds each.

DEFA Mle 552, 30x113mmB DEFA, France, 1954

A direct copy of the experimental 30x85mmB Mauser MK213, this weapon was an instant success. It was a gas-operated revolver cannon with five chambers and medium barrel. The Mle 552 was adopted by the French Air Force as the CN-MIT-30-F1 and made in several variants, including the Mle 554 with RoF 18/30. All models were widely exported, and some were licensed to Israel and South Africa.

The Dassault *Mirage IIIC* fighter (1960) mounted two Mle 552 guns with 125 rounds per gun. The Brazilian AMX A-1 ground attack aircraft (1990) had two Mle 554 guns with 125 rounds per gun.

The British Royal Ordnance ADEN-series was very similar and fired ammunition identical except for the priming; use same stats except for Ewt 192.

The SEPECAT *Jaguar GR.1* ground attack fighter (1973) had two ADEN Mk 4 with 150 rounds per gun. The BAe *Sea Harrier FRS.1* V/STOL fighter (1979) carried two ADEN Mk 4 with 130 rounds per gun in a belly pack.

Tulamash GSh-23, 23x115mm Afanasiev-Makarov, USSR, 1959

A standard Soviet aircraft cannon, the GSh-23 was a twin-barreled gun whose medium-length barrels fired alternatively, an arrangement first used in the German 7.92x57mm Vorwerk-Gast MG17 of WWI. It fed from a disintegrating belt. The GSh-23 was license-made in China and Yugoslavia. Shrapnel rounds were available for ground attack. They exploded at 1/2D, scattering pellets in a narrow cone along the flight path. Even chaff and IR-decoy rounds were made in this caliber, but only used in bombers.

The gun was widely used and most often found in a belly pack with 200 rounds, for example on the MiG-21PFM (*Fishbed-F*) fighter (1964) or MiG-23M (*Flogger-B*) fighter (1973), but it was also installed in the chin turret of the Mi-24VP (*Hind-E*) attack helicopter (1992), feeding from a 470-round belt (pp. SO88). The Tupolev Tu-22M-2 (*Backfire-B*) strategic bomber (1971) had two in a remote-controlled tail barbette, each with 600 rounds.

Ford Aeronutronic M129, 40x53mmSR NATO, USA, 1963

Although strictly speaking an automatic grenade launcher, it was used operationally very similarly to a cannon. The M129 was externally powered by an electric motor and had a short barrel. It fired the same belted ammunition as the Naval Ordnance MK19 MOD 0 grenade machine gun (p. HT121). The gun was widely used during the Vietnam War.

The M129 was first installed in the chin turret of the Bell AH-1G *Cobra* attack helicopter (1967) with 300 grenades (side-by-side with a 7.62x51mm GE M134 minigun and its 4,000 rounds). The experimental Lockheed AH-56A *Cheyenne* attack helicopter (canceled 1972) mounted it in a chin turret with 780 rounds. The USAF used it as a doorgun on the Bell UH-1N helicopter (p. SO81).

General Electric M61A1 *Vulcan*, 20x102mm M50, USA, 1964

After WWII, the U.S. Air Force started to look for a new aircraft gun based on the multi-barrel Gatling guns. In 1956, the M61 *Vulcan* was adopted. It was an externally powered cannon with six long barrels, feeding from a disintegrating belt. First installed in the Lockheed F-104A *Starfighter*, it was soon superseded by the M61A1 variant, which used a linkless feeder for better reliability and higher rate of fire. It remained the standard American aircraft gun for many decades. Like most modern aircraft cannons, the M61A1 had two selectable rates of fire, low (RoF 66) or high (RoF 100). The original M61 could only fire at RoF 66. The ammo was contained in a large drum magazine, whose capacity differed depending on the installation. The M61A1 was license-made in Italy and Japan.

The more recent M61A2 (1990) had been reduced in weight; Ewt 200.

The Lockheed F-104A *Starfighter* (1956) mounted the M61 with 750 rounds, the McDonnell Douglas F-15C *Eagle* (1979) had the M61A1 with 940 rounds, the General Dynamics F-16A *Fighting Falcon* (1979) had the M61A1 with 511 rounds, and the Lockheed Martin F-22A *Raptor* (2002) carried the M61A2 with 480 rounds. The Boeing B-52H *Stratofortress* bomber (1961) used to have one M61 as remote-controlled tail gun with 1,242 rounds (RoF 41). The Lockheed AC-130H *Pave Spectre II* gunship (1972) carried two M61A1 guns with 3,000 rounds per gun, both firing to the left at RoF 41 (p. SO89).

The GAU-4/A (1966) was a self-powered version (Ewt 275, Pow 0) installed in a gunpod with 1,200 rounds.

A single pod was carried by Royal Air Force McDonnell Douglas *Phantom* FGR.2 fighter/bombers (from 1969).

The M168 was the U.S. Army's variant for use in anti-aircraft systems, mounted on a trailer or armored vehicle; Ewt 299, RoF 16/50. It was license-made in South Korea.

The M163 *Vulcan* air defense system (1968) mounted an M168 gun in a one-man turret on a modified FMC M113A1 armored personnel carrier. It had 1,100 rounds ready-to-fire and 1,000 in reserve.

It was also part of the shipborne MK15 *Phalanx* radar-controlled Close-In Weapon System (CIWS) first deployed in 1980. It typically fired APDSDU rounds in 60-round or 100-round bursts; Dam 6dx5(3), 1/2D 2,600, RoF 50, WPS 0.6.

The USS *Enterprise* aircraft carrier mounted three *Phalanx* stations from 1980, each with an integral magazine with 989 rounds, while the FFG-7 *Perry*-class frigates (from 1980) mounted one each.

OTO Melara 76/62 *Compatto*, 76x636mmR OTO Melara, Italy, 1967

One of the most popular medium-caliber naval weapons, adopted by 50 navies and license-made in Australia, India, Japan, Spain and the USA (as the MK75 MOD 0). It had a long, seawater-cooled barrel and was useful against both ships and aircraft. Anti-armor ammunition had been developed for use in armored vehicles, but was not usually used with this gun. It was typically installed in a remote-controlled gun turret.

The 76/62 *Super Rapido* was an improved version with RoF 2*.

The Italian *Audace* destroyer (1973) carried four *Super Rapido* with 85 ready rounds per gun. The U.S. Navy FFG-7 *Perry*-class frigates (1978), the PHM-1 *Pegasus*-class hydrofoil patrol ships (1978) and the U.S. Coast Guard WMEC-901 *Bear*-class cutters (1983) all mounted one MK75 MOD 0 with 80 ready rounds.

General Electric GAU-8/A *Avenger*, 30x173mm Oerlikon, USA, 1975

The most powerful cannon ever carried by an aircraft. It was a hydraulic rotary cannon with seven long barrels and a linkless feed. Its recoil was so high that firing it considerably slowed down the jet-engined aircraft it was installed in!

The main round was APDU, which was usually mixed 5:1 with SAPHE. Its ammo had alloy cases.

The GAU-8/A was designed specifically for the Fairchild A-10A *Thunderbolt II* ground attack aircraft (1977). When introduced, it offered dual firing rates (RoF 35/70), but since the late 1980s, the gun on the A-10A could only fire at RoF 65. The A-10A had a 1,174-round drum magazine.

The Dutch SGE-30 *Goalkeeper* (1980) was a shipborne CIWS armed with the GAU-8/A. It fired an APDS or FAPDS round at RoF 70. From 1988, the British *Invincible*-class aircraft carriers mounted two *Goalkeeper* systems with 1,190 ready rounds each.

A development from this gun was the GAU-13/A, a 4-barreled weapon powered by a pneumatic motor. Use the same stats except for Ewt 339, RoF 40, Pow 44.75 kW. It was used in a gunpod with 353 rounds.

Tulamash 2A42, 30x165mm Shipunov, USSR, 1976

Another widespread Soviet design, this weapon was originally developed for the BMP-2 infantry fighting vehicle. It was a conventional single-barreled gun with dual-belt feeder. The 2A42 was license-made in Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia and India.

The BMP-2 (1976) carried 305 SAPHE rounds and 195 AP rounds ready-to-use.

The Kamov Ka-50 (*Hokum-A*) attack helicopter (1995) was also armed with this cannon. It carried 250 SAPHE and 250 APEX rounds (RoF 5/15).

The improved 2A72 (1990) was a lighter and less complex weapon. Use the same stats except for Ewt 185, RoF 5*.

The 2A72 armed the BMP-3 (1990), which carried 305 SAPHE rounds and 195 APDS rounds.

Mauser BK27, 27x145mmB Mauser, West Germany, 1977

This belt-fed revolver cannon with five chambers and a long barrel was based on the experimental 20x135mm Mauser MG213 of 1945. It had a high rate of fire and very good reliability. It typically fired 10- or 20-round bursts.

The multi-national Panavia PA200 IDS *Tornado* fighter/bomber (1982) had two BK27 with 180 rounds per gun (typically SAPHE), while the Swedish SAAB JAS39A *Gripen* (1995) carried a single gun with 120 rounds.

In 2001, the BK27 installed on the remote-controlled MLG27 mount entered service with the German Navy. The MLG27 accommodated a 90-round belt and fired FAPDS.

The Mauser BK27-2 was an improved version with linkless feed; Ewt 297.

It armed the multi-national Eurofighter EF2000 *Typhoon* (2001), which carried 150 rounds. The same gun licensed to Boeing was selected for the Joint Strike Fighter developed for the U.S. and British militaries (either the Boeing F-32A or Lockheed Martin F-35A, from about 2008). The F-32A/B carried 150 rounds of HEDP.

Izhmash GSh-301, 30x165mm Shipunov, USSR, 1978

A belt-fed gun with a water-cooled medium barrel, very light and powerful. It was developed in the late 1970s and entered service in 1984. The GSh-301 fired electrically primed ammunition, which was otherwise similar to the rounds used by the 2A42.

The MiG-29 *Strizh* (*Fulcrum-C*) fighter/bomber (1984) carried one gun with 150 rounds, as did the Su-27 (*Flanker-B*) fighter (1984).

Hughes M242 *Bushmaster*, 25x137mm Oerlikon, USA, 1981

Design of this weapon started in 1976, and it was first fielded in 1983 by the U.S. Army on the FMC M2 *Bradley* infantry fighting vehicle. It was a member of the *Chain Gun*®-family, which means it was an externally powered gun employing two internal chains to operate the action. The M242 had a dual-feed system, so that it could change from one ammunition belt to another at the flick of a switch. Although its maximum theoretical RoF was 8*, all weapons used by the U.S. military had it fixed at RoF 3*, to increase accuracy and reduce ammo consumption. It was typically fired in 3-round bursts.

The FMC M2 *Bradley* (1983) carried 300 ready-to-use rounds, 225 SAPHE and 75 APDS or, since 1991, APFSDSDU. Some 600 spare rounds were stored in the back of the vehicle. The DDGMC LAV-25 wheeled armored personnel carrier (1983) used by the USMC had 210 ready rounds (150 SAPHE and 60 APDS) and 420 in reserve.

The MK38 MOD 0 *Sea Snake* (1988) was the same gun in a naval deck mount and used on smaller U.S. Navy and Coast Guard vessels. It fired SAPHE or APDU.

The PC-1 *Cyclone*-class patrol boats (1993) had two mounts with 150 ready rounds per gun.

The MK44 MOD 0 *Bushmaster II* was nothing more than a scaled-up version of the smaller M242, chambered for the 30x173mm Oerlikon round. It even shared a large number of components with the earlier weapon; use stats of the GAU-8/A except for Ewt 324, RoF 3*, Pow 1.1kW. It fired single shots, 5-round bursts or full automatic. An APFSDS round was in service; Dam 6dx9(2). The *Bushmaster II* became available in 1992 and was selected by the U.S. Navy.

The Swedish-designed Hägglunds CV9030 infantry fighting vehicle (1998) adopted by Finland, Norway and Switzerland mounted the *Bushmaster II* and carried 160 ready rounds and 240 stowed. The General Dynamics AAV amphibious assault vehicle (2006) adopted by the U.S. Marines was armed with the MK44-0 and carried 50 ready APFSDS and 100 ready SAPHE rounds plus 400 stowed.

General Electric GAU-12/U *Equalizer*, 25x137mm Oerlikon, USA, 1983

The GAU-12/U was a five-barreled hydraulic/electric rotary cannon, which, although about the same size as the M61A1 *Vulcan*, was actually based on the GAU-8/A. It fired the same cartridge as the M242 *Bushmaster*, but not usually the same rounds. Typically fired 10-round or 30-round bursts. It was license-made in Italy.

A GAU-12/U with RoF 63 was carried in a belly pack by the U.S. Marine Corps' McDonnell Douglas-BAe AV-8B *Harrier II* S/VTOL fighter/bomber (1989) with 300 rounds SAPHE (p. VE142). The Rockwell AC-130U *Pave Spectre III* gunship (1994) mounted one side-firing GAU-12/U with 3,000 rounds (p. SO89).

The DDGMC LAV-AD light armored air defense vehicle (1997) adopted by the Marines had 385 rounds ready-to-use and 600 in reserve (the ground version had RoF 30).

Hughes M230, 30x113mmB DEFA, USA, 1984

Development of this externally powered helicopter gun began in 1973. The first of the *Chain Gun*®-series, the M230 was an especially lightweight and compact weapon with a medium barrel. The only ammo nature commonly used was a HEDP round with alloy case.

The M230 was installed in the MDHC AH-64A *Apache* attack helicopter (1986). Linkless rounds were fed to it from a 1,200-round magazine. Although the gun was quite reliable, the actual weapon system as installed in the AH-64A proved to be unsatisfactory, resulting in frequent jams (Malf 16). A temporary fix was to carry only about 500 rounds of ammo (Malf Crit).

General Dynamics M301 *Vulcan II*, 20x102mm M50, USA, 1998

The M301 *Vulcan II* three-barreled helicopter gun was an update of the old 20x102mm General Electric M197. It was lightened and used ammunition with alloy cases for reduced weight.

It was installed in the Boeing-Sikorsky RAH-66A *Comanche* attack/scout helicopter (2002), feeding from a 500-round disintegrating belt.

The UHED *Gunhed* mecha (2020) mounted one gun with a 1,750-round belt.

Its predecessor, the General Electric M197 (1969), was a lightened three-barreled version of the M61A1; use the stats of the M61A1 except for Ewt 146, RoF 12/25, Pow 2.2kW/6.4kW.

The M197 was first installed in the Bell AH-1J *Sea Cobra* attack helicopter (1969), feeding from a 750-round belt, and also armed the AH-1S *Cobra*, AH-1W *Super Cobra* and AH-1Z *King Cobra*. On the AH-1-series, it fired 16-round bursts at RoF 12.

A gunpod used with, among others, the Sikorsky MH-60G *Pave Hawk* SpecOps helicopter (1992), held a M197 and 300 rounds (p. SO82).

CTAI CT2000, 40x225mmCTA *Super Forty*, France/UK, 2004

Cased Telescoped Ammunition used a large-volume, can-shaped cartridge case (as opposed to the usual bottle-shape), which completely enclosed the projectile. This made it lighter, more powerful, allowed it to be stored more space-efficiently and to be handled more easily than conventional ammo. CTA International, a joint venture between GIAT and Royal Ordnance, developed this externally powered cannon since the early 1990s for use in armored fighting vehicles. It fired 40x225mmCTA rounds with a plastic case through a very long barrel. The CT2000 had a linkless triple-feed system. Apart from standard ammunition, CTAI also designed a guided APEDS-CLGP round, which fired a sabot, armor-piercing tungsten projectile with HE charge. This laserguided 25mm dart was modified from the submunitions of the British *Starstreak* surface-to-air missile. Use it like a TL8 CLGP munition (p. VE112) with SALH terminal guidance (+3 to skill), with the important difference that it can only be used in direct fire.

The CT2000 was compact enough to be installed in even a relatively small fighting vehicle (in fact it had less inboard length than the M242 *Bushmaster*), and was retrofitted to the British GKN FV510 *Warrior*. The French adopted it for their new family of wheeled armored vehicles, and it was selected for the U.S. Army FSCS armored scout vehicle (2007). It remained a standard weapon until about 2050.

Mauser RMK30-2, 30x230mmCLTA, Germany, 2005

An advanced recoilless gun firing caseless telescoped ammunition through a medium barrel. It was a front-loading, externally powered revolver gun with three chambers. The recoilless operation allowed for a high-powered weapon in a very light, rotating mount. Designed in the 1990s, it was proposed for the German variant of the Eurocopter *Tiger* gunship and also for the KMW *Wiesel* microtank. It was extremely accurate, further amplified by state-of-the-art targeting electronics. The gun fired single shots or 3-round bursts.

In 2005, the German Army adopted the gun for use in an external chin mount under the Eurocopter UHT *Tiger* attack helicopter. The mount carried 40 linkless rounds.

Mauser MK50, 50x330mmCTA *Supershot*, Germany, 2006

Beginning in 1985, this externally powered gun was developed by Rheinmetall as the Rh503. It was designed from the start as being able to be converted from conventional 35x228mm Oerlikon ammo to the new plastic-cased 50x330mmCTA round by simply changing the barrel; with 35mm SAPHE-SD rounds, it had these stats: Dam 6dx6(0.5) plus 3d[4d], 1/2D 3,500, Max 8,700, Ewt 1,078, WPS 3.5. AHEAD, FAPDS and APFSDS ammo was also available, but the 35mm variant was soon outgrown by threat vehicles. In both calibers, the gun had a very long barrel

and linear linkless dual feeder. Since Rheinmetall had taken over Mauser, Oerlikon and a number of other European defense companies in the 1990s, series production of the MK50 was transferred to Mauser.

The MK50 was adopted by the German Army as the main gun of its infantry fighting vehicle for the 21st century, the *Marder 2*. It remained a standard weapon until about 2050.

New Ammunition Types

SAPHEC, Semi-Armor Piercing, High Explosive, Concussion (Late TL6)

Developed during WWII as the *Minengeschoß*, this round for use against aircraft develops few fragments, but has a high explosive payload. Counts as flame attack. Available only for cannon. First available in 1940.

	Type	Damage	Rng	WPS	CPS	Acc
	Cr.	KE(0.5)	-	/1.5	x4	-
plus	Cr.	CxX/12,000				

FAPDS, Frangible Armor Piercing, Discarding Sabot (Late TL7)

An anti-armor round with a sub-caliber penetrator which disintegrates into pyrophoric fragments after penetration. Counts as flame attack. First available in the 1990s.

	Type	Damage	Rng	WPS	CPS	Acc
	Cr.	1.33xKE(2)	-	/1.5	x6	-
plus	Cr.*	Fragmentation damage according to p. VE113				

AHEAD, Advanced High Efficiency And Destruction (Late TL7)

A multi-mode round which can either function as a HEPF-ABF round or as SAPHE. The heavy metal fragments count as armor-piercing, i.e. [8d(2)] are treated as eight 1d(2) attacks. Its fuse is set electronically while leaving the muzzle of the gun. Available only for cannon. First available after 1991.

	Type	Damage	Rng	WPS	CPS	Acc
	Cr.	KE(0.5)	-	-	x8	-
plus	Exp.*	CxX/24,000 and armor-piercing fragmentation damage according to p. VE113. Fragmentation damage is doubled in HEPF-ABF mode.				

APEDS, Armor Piercing, Explosive, Discarding Sabot (TL8)

An anti-armor round with a sub-caliber penetrator with explosive charge. Counts as flame attack. Available only for cannon. First available after 2000.

	Cr.	KE(2)	x1.5	/1.5	x6	-
plus	Exp.*	CxX/64,000 and fragmentation damage according to p. VE113 divided by 2.				

New Ammunition Option

Lightweight Alloy Case (Mid TL7)

Popular for aircraft guns to reduce weight. Divide WPS by 1.33 and multiply CPS by 1.33. VPS is not affected. First available in the 1970s.

Notes For The Table

Ammo: The most common ammo types are listed, in order of approximate "popularity". Note that for some weapons, these are the only ones available, while others reflect only a part of the many types produced. If in doubt, use only the ones in the chart. Note that APEX becomes available at TL6!

Malf: v(c) is short-hand for ver (crit) and means the verification must be another critical miss for the weapon to malfunction. For some modern weapons, this is still not good enough!

Damage: Mainly calculated according to pp. VE104 and VE112-113, when and if the results did not deviate too much from reality. For example, this was the case with the 30x113mmB HEDP. The rules said 2d+1(5), which penetrates a lousy average of 14.5mm of armor steel. The real thing blasts through an average of 70mm, or 11d(5). This author has opted for 5d+2(10), as it more accurately reflects the real-world performance of the round. Explosive damage was always calculated using real-world data on the explosive contents of shells. However, the Dam of KE rounds generally confirms to the rules, including the grossly inflated penetration values of some AP rounds.

1/2D and Max: Based on real-world data. The results from p. VE105 are generally too low. 1/2D (xx) means that, while accuracy suffers, Dam does not. This is generally confined to explosive rounds. Some shortened Max ranges are the result of self-destruct fuses (SD), which blow the projectile up at a given range.

RoF: The notation xx/xx means the gun has two selectable rates of fire. Usually, the lower one is for use against ground targets, the higher one for use against aircraft. Only those with a * are capable of single shots.

Ewt: Empty weight of the gun, without any mount. Taken from real-world sources. Slight differences in weight are possible, usually due to varying installations.

Cost: The costs are based on the few figures that could be secured: the HS.404 was priced at \$3,500 in 1937, the M242 cost \$40,000 in 1990. All other costs were based on that, but realistically, the costs are just for comparison. Weapons pricing is more often than not a matter of politics.

WPS: All taken from real-world sources.

Pow: Power requirements were taken from real-world sources except those of the M301 and RMK30-2, which had to be guesstimated.

Name	Malf	Ammo	Type	Damage	SS	Acc	1/2D	Max	RoF	Ewt	Cost	WPS	VPS	CPS	TL	Pow
Maxim QF 1-pdr Mk I	16	SAPLE	Cr	5dx2(0.5) plus 1d-3[2d]	20	8	900	3,000	5	410	\$2,800	1.4	0.0093	\$0.56	5	0
		Canister	Cr	5d	20	3	100	300				1.8	0.0093	\$0.28	5	
		SAPHE	Cr	5dx2(0.5) plus 1d[2d]	20	8	900	3,000				1.6	0.0093	\$1.4	6	
		APEX	Cr	5dx2(2) plus 1d-3[2d]	20	8	900	3,000				1.4	0.0093	\$3.5	6	
Becker Kanone	crit	Solid	Cr	5dx2	18	10	800	2,800	6*	55	\$2,200	0.4	0.0027	\$0.2	6	0
		SAPHE	Cr	5dx2(0.5) plus 1d-4[2d]	18	10	1,000	2,800				0.4	0.0027	\$0.8	6	
Oerlikon S	crit	SAPHE	Cr	6dx3(0.5) plus 1d-3[2d]	20	14	2,000	6,400	5*	135	\$5,400	0.54	0.0036	\$0.58	6	0
		SAPHE-SD	Cr	6dx3(0.5) plus 1d-4[2d]	20	14	2,000	2,000				0.58	0.0036	\$0.58	6	6
		API	Cr	6dx3(2)	20	14	2,000	6,400				0.58	0.0036	\$1.16	6	

Bofors m/36	crit	HE	Exp*	3d[4d]	20	14	(4,000)	11,200	2*	580	\$7,700	4.6	0.031	\$4.6	6	0
		HE-SD	Exp*	3d[4d]	20	14	3,700	3,700				4.6	0.031	\$4.6	6	
		AP	Cr	6dx6(2)	20	14	4,000	9,600				4.6	0.031	\$6.9	6	
Mauser MG151/20	crit	SAPHE	Cr	5dx3(0.5) plus 1d-3[2d]	20	13	1,000	5,000	12	92	\$3,700	0.45	0.003	\$0.45	6	neg
		SAPHEC-SD	Cr	5dx3(0.5) plus 1d-2	20	13	1,000	2,300				0.4	0.003	\$0.9	6	
		AP	Cr	5dx3(2)	20	13	1,000	5,000				0.45	0.003	\$0.68	6	
Tulamash VYa-23	crit	API	Cr	7dx3(2)	20	14	2,300	7,800	10	151	\$6,000	1.0	0.0067	\$2	6	0
		SAPHE	Cr	7dx3(0.5) plus 1d-1[2d]	20	14	2,300	7,800				1.0	0.0067	\$1	6	
Rheinmetall-Borsig BK3.7	crit	APCR	Cr	6dx5(2)	25	12	2,000	6,000	3*	598	\$8,000	2.4	0.021	\$8	6	0
		APEX	Cr	6dx4(2) plus 3d+2[4d]	25	12	2,000	6,000				3.2	0.021	\$8	6	
		SAPHEC-SD	Cr	6dx4(0.5) plus 3d+2	25	12	2,000	3,200				3.1	0.021	\$6.4	6	
Rheinmetall-Borsig MK108	crit	SAPHEC	Cr	5dx3(0.5) plus 2d+2	20	10	600	3,000	10	128	\$2,500	1.06	0.007	\$2.12	6	neg
Mauser MK213	crit	SAPHEC	Cr	5dx3(0.5) plus 3d+1	20	13	1,500	5,000	19	165	\$6,600	1.1	0.0073	\$2.2	6	neg
		APEX	Cr	5dx3(2) plus 2d+1[2d]	20	13	1,500	5,000				1.1	0.0073	\$2.75	6	
DEFA Mle 552	crit	SAPHE-SD	Cr	6dx3(0.5) plus 1d-1[2d]	20	14	1,500	3,300	21	180	\$29,000	1.08	0.0072	\$4.32	7	neg
		SAPHEC-SD	Cr	6dx3(0.5) plus 2d-1	20	14	1,500	3,300				0.97	0.0072	\$8.64	7	
		API	Cr	6dx3(2)	20	14	1,500	5,000				1.08	0.0072	\$8.64	/	
Tulamash GSh-23	crit	SAPHE	Cr	6dx3(0.5) plus 1d-2[2d]	20	12	1,500	7,000	56	111	\$18,000	0.77	0.0051	\$3.08	7	neg
		API	Cr	6dx3(2)	20	12	1,500	7,000				0.77	0.0051	\$6.16	7	
		Shrapnel	Cr	9d	20	12	1,500	3,000				0.77	0.0051	\$4.62	7	
GE M61A1 Vulcan	v(c)	SAPHE	Cr	6dx3(0.5) plus 1d-4[2d]	20	15	2,000	6,000	66/100	252	\$40,000	0.57	0.0038	\$2.3	7	17kW/26kW
		API	Cr	6dx3(2)	20	15	2,000	6,000				0.57	0.0038	\$4.6	7	
		APEX	Cr	6dx3(2) plus 1d-4[2d]	20	15	2,000	6,000				0.57	0.0038	\$5.7	/	
Ford M129	ver	HE	Exp*	3d[3d]	20	8	1,600	2,200	6	45	\$12,000	0.75	0.005	\$3	7	1.1kW
OTO Melara 76/62 Comatto	crit	HE	Exp*	6dx4[6d]	25	16	(8,700)	17,800	1.5*	3,295	\$175,000	27.5	0.18	\$110	7	44kW
		HEPF	Exp*	6dx4[6d]	25	16	(8,700)	17,800				26.8	0.18	\$275	7	
		SAPHE	Cr	6dx11(0.5) plus 6dx3[6d]	25	16	8,700	17,800				27.5	0.18	\$110	7	
		APFSDS	Cr	6dx26(2)	25	17	3,500	26,000				20.0	0.18	\$440	/	
GE GAU-8/A Avenger	v(c)	APDU	Cr	6dx6(3)	25	15	3,000	9,000	35/70	620	\$75,000	1.6	0.01	\$24	7	29kW/57kW
		SAPHE	Cr	6dx5(0.5) plus 2d-1[2d]	25	15	3,000	9,000	1.5				0.01	\$8	7	
		APDS	Cr	6dx8(2)	25	15	4,000	13,500				1.2	0.01	\$20	7	
Tulamash 2A42	crit	SAPHE-SD	Cr	6dx5(0.5) plus 2d[2d]	20	14	3,000	4,000	4*/9*	253	\$27,000	1.9	0.013	\$7.6	7	neg
		AP	Cr	6dx5(2)	20	14	3,000	8,000				1.9	0.013	\$11.4	7	
		APEX	Cr	6dx5(2) plus 2d[2d]	20	14	3,000	8,000				1.9	0.013	\$11.4	7	
		APDS	Cr	6dx8(2)	20	14	4,000	12,000				1.7	0.013	\$19	/	
Mauser BK27	ver	SAPHE	Cr	7dx4(0.5) plus 1d+1[2d]	20	15	3,000	8,000	16/28	220	\$25,000	1.2	0.008	\$4.8	7	neg
		APEX	Cr	7dx4(2) plus 1d[2d]	20	15	3,000	8,000				1.2	0.008	\$12	7	
		FAPDS	Cr*	6dx6(2) plus [2d]	20	15	4,000	12,000				0.8	0.008	\$14.4	7	
		HEDP	Exp*	5d+2(10) plus 1d[2d]	20	15	3,000	8,000				1.2	0.008	\$7.2	7	
Izhmash GSh-301	crit	SAPHE-SD	Cr	6dx5(0.5) plus 2d[2d]	20	14	2,500	4,000	27	101	\$16,000	1.9	0.013	\$7.6	7	neg
		APEX	Cr	6dx5(2) plus 2d[2d]	20	14	2,500	8,000				1.9	0.013	\$11.4	/	

Hughes M242 <i>Bushmaster</i>	ver	SAPHE	Cr	6dx4(0.5) plus 1d[2d]	20	15	2,500	7,500	3* or 8*	244	\$40,000	1.1	0.0073	\$4.4	7	2.2kW or 6kW
		APDS	Cr	6dx7(2)	20	15	2,500	10,500				1.0	0.0073	\$11	7	
		APFSDSDU	Cr	6dx7(3)	20	16	3,000	17,000				1.0	0.0073	\$26	7	
		APDU	Cr	6dx5(3)	20	15	2,500	7,500				1.1	0.0073	\$13.2	7	
GE GAU-12/U <i>Equalizer</i>	v(c)	SAPHE	Cr	6dx4(0.5) plus 1d[2d]	20	15	2,500	7,500	30/60	270	\$43,000	1.1	0.0073	\$4.4	7	5.5kW/10kW
		APEX	Cr	6dx4(2) plus 1d[2d]	20	15	2,500	7,500				1.1	0.0073	\$8.8	/	
Hughes M230	ver	HEDP	Exp*	5d+2(10) plus 1d[2d]	20	14	2,000	4,400	10	123	\$30,000	0.77	0.0072	\$6.1	7	2.2kW
GD M301 <i>Vulcan II</i>	v(c)	APEX	Cr	6dx3(2) plus 1d-2[2d]	20	15	2,000	6,000	12/25	76	\$34,000	0.4	0.0038	\$7.8	7	1.6kW/4.4kW
CTAI CT2000	ver	APFSDS	Cr	6dx11(2)	25	16	4,500	18,000	6*	725	\$60,000	4.0	0.015	\$110	7	9kW
		AHEAD	Cr	6dx6(0.5) plus 3d[4d(2)]	25	15	3,500	9,000				4.8	0.015	\$110	7	
		APEDS-CLGP	Cr	6dx6(2) plus 1d[2d]	25	15	4,000	12,000				4.2	0.015	\$833	8	
Mauser RMK30-2	ver	APEX	Cr	7dx4(2) plus 1d+2[2d]	20	16	3,000	7,000	6*	220	\$40,000	1.1	0.0075	\$22	8	2.3kW
Mauser MK50	ver	APFSDS	Cr	6dx13(2)	25	16	5,000	20,000	6*	1,133	\$90,000	4.4	0.017	\$120	7	8kW
		AHEAD	Cr	6dx7(0.5) plus 5d[4d(2)]	25	15	4,000	12,000				5.0	0.017	\$120	7	
		HEPF	Exp*	8d[4d]	25	15	(4,000)	12,000				5.0	0.017	\$150	7	
		APEDS	Cr	6dx7(2) plus 2d[2d]	25	15	5,000	18,000				4.5	0.017	\$90	7	

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No Help For It, Part II

Okay; this week I'm continuing what I was talking about [last week](#): creating epic adventures where the heroes believe they can handle it themselves. After all, in the Real World when most of us face problems, we call someone else. "Hmm. Well, the entire neighborhood is being consumed by a raging inferno, but I have a Super Soaker and some baking soda that might do the trick . . ."

But when you're trying to create something epic, it's no fun to have your heroes calling up someone else who can help. Of course, it's also not fun to stretch believability to the breaking point by *not* having them call someone else. Here, then, are some more tips for keeping your heroes active and heroic, without having them whimper.

- **Smaller-Scale Worlds.** Consider: from an excitement standpoint, what is the difference, really, between blowing up the earth, and, say, a city? (Outside of the larger insurance premiums.) The *Freeport* adventure series for *d20* takes place entirely in one city; if the heroes fail, disaster might befall the entirety of Freeport. So if you're in a superhero campaign, having the heroes save the day in Ann Arbor means a heck of a lot to the residents of that city, while limiting the options of the heroes to call the Global Justice Defense Force.
- **Keystones.** Even blowing up something as simple as a building can be grandly epic . . . if it's the right building. I once ran an *In Nomine* adventure that took place on New Year's Eve, 1999. I knew that I couldn't let not-the-new-millennium-but-everyone's-drunk-like-it-is go by without *something* big happening, but I didn't want to nuke the world or anything so melodramatic. So I decided to try and build an adventure around a room full of revelers. I had the adventure take place in Rotorua, New Zealand, which (as I understand it) was one of the first points to ring in the new year. There the bad guys were going to attack a room of partying people and try to destroy the hotel they were in. Why? Because then for the entire day -- the dawn of this new millenium (not) -- the news would be abuzz of this awful tragedy.

At its base the heroes were doing nothing more than saving one hotel. But, of course, it was about so much more.

- **"It's important to us!"** Otherwise simple adventures can be elevated to epic status -- while limiting the possibilities of calling for help -- by making them personal. For example, if the heroes have a powerful patron, and someone is seeking to destroy that patron's company, livelihood, and life (and, of course, his support of the party), it might not warrant the full-scale attention and aid of the authorities. But it will definitely make the heroes feel similar epic-style elation if they overcome the adversity.
- **Most authorities are more interested in maintaining the status quo.** Consider the following scenario: You know that someone is going to kill half the earth, so you call the authorities. They'll probably show up in moments and help, since their interest is in maintaining the status quo. Now consider if someone has developed a cure for a disease . . . a disease that, left unchecked, will kill half the earth. And someone is trying to kill *that* person. You might the police, but they probably won't be able to help you much.

Something wonderful failing to happen can often be just as devastating (and epic) as something awful happening directly . . . but most authorities don't have the resources to help these wonderful things happen. (Fortunately, a band of correctly-placed heroes might . . .) If you're reluctant to introduce a cure for cancer, cold fusion power, or other wonderful goodies to your campaign world (and I don't blame you), you can be an evil GM and introduce *bad* things five or six adventures earlier . . . only to give the heroes a chance to "save the world" by removing these adverse conditions. In this case, let your imagination run wild: create odd diseases, have the world run out of fossil fuel, create a grain blight. You'll be fixing the problems soon enough anyway . . . presuming, of course, the heroes are heroic. (And they probably won't be able to call for help as easily.)

- **"Wow. This is big . . . kinda."** One of the things I loved about the old *DC Heroes RPG* from Mayfair (and which also appears in *Blood of Heroes*) was their designation of threat and consequence levels for determining experience. For example, you can have something that threatens things on a planetary or galactic level, but which has temporary or permanent non-fatal consequences. Consider the possibilities that opens: If you have an adventure that threatens to, say, remove the memory of a first kiss from everyone on earth, that's a Big Deal . . .

somewhat. But it's not the sort of thing you're able to call most authorities about.

Non-fatal large-scale crises can feel much like world-blowing-up epics, but don't have quite as high stakes. If someone wants to destroy the Internet, or mutate the world's corn into something that tastes like broccoli, or surround Mars in a force field so he can have that world for himself, these will have real, lasting effects. And the missions, though weird, should be epic enough to get your heroes motivated to stop them.

Weird can be good. Epic weird can be great.

Hopefully I've given you some ideas to help keep your players on the edge of your seat, without having their characters reaching for help on the phone.

* * *

I've been forgetting to mention this for a few weeks now. Whoops.

Anyway, for those of you who've been wondering what I look like (or whether or not I show up on film), a picture of me appears on page 32 of issue of *Knights of the Dinner Table* #54. But it's not a terribly flattering picture, and they call me "Steve." So if you want to see a picture that doesn't make me look quite like those guys that're way too interested in the guinea pigs at the pet store, I might direct you to:

<http://www.waitingforgo.com/photo1a.jpg>

Or you might want to see what *Pyramid*-chained web guru Keith Johnson has done to that picture at:

<http://staff.sjgames.com/~keith/pyramid/SMarsh.jpg>

But probably not. I'm not that interesting, after all.

* * *

John Kovalic is still catching up on his vacation backlog o' work, which explains why he's still not back with us. I know that I'm *still* recovering from the vacation I took back in February, and hope John's a bit more able to get caught up than my cluttered self.

Good luck, John! All-speed . . . we miss you!

* * *

By the by, in case I haven't mentioned it lately, please feel free to make your thoughts and comments known, either over at the [Pyramid discussion boards](#), or by sending me an email at pyramid@sjgames.com.

--*Steven Marsh*

* * *

(*Last week's answer*) *Spelljammer Monstrous Compendium*, Space Hamster entry.

(*Three stars*) "Anyhow, Kennedy started out ruling with an iron fist, and he hasn't mellowed much over the years. If anything, matters have gotten worse."

The Lindbergh Variations

"One is constantly aware that we live in a world where dreams and reality interchange."

-- Charles A. Lindbergh

In the quantum fog of High Weirdness, pulp, and Alternate History, some people just seem bound and determined to be strange attractors, to take more than their fair share of Secret History. Charles Augustus Lindbergh is one of those folk -- which is all the more uncanny, since he first became an American icon of normalcy. To make matters worse, the key things we all know about Lindbergh aren't true at all -- he was the 92nd person to fly the Atlantic, and whatever his considerable failings, he wasn't a Nazi -- making Lindbergh's "history" even more of a ramshackle scrim than that of most famous folk. In short, even Lindberghian heroism won't fly us out of this quantum fog -- but he makes a dandy pilot for those of us who would fain fly in. Shall we?

"It would be almost three decades before Lindbergh would discuss it publicly, but after almost twenty-four hours of his ordeal -- at around five o'clock in the morning by his clock -- the fuselage behind him filled with phantoms -- 'vaguely outlined forms, transparent, moving, riding weightless with me in the plane.' He later recorded that these ghosts were benign, vaporous presences. They permeated the fabric walls of the plane, coming and going at will. With human voices they spoke to him above the noise of the engine, advising him on his flight and giving him 'messages of importance unattainable in ordinary life.' They were human in shape but devoid of real form."

-- A. Scott Berg, *Lindbergh*

On May 21, 1927, Lindbergh landed at Le Bourget Field in Paris, and became the world's first hero. Radio, cable, newspapers, and the brand-new technology of the newsreel carried Lindbergh's heroic feat and open, Midwestern countenance to every corner of the globe. Nobody was more popular in every nation of the globe than Charles Lindbergh -- who probably became a voodoo loa at that moment in the sheer backwash of global relief and adoration. Perhaps that's what the phantoms in his cockpit told him -- and perhaps it was to commune with them (or with [the Rods](#) or with some other aerial intelligence), rather than to claim the Orteig Prize, that Lindbergh made his trip. His 33-hour flight was thus the equivalent of a shamanic ordeal to pierce heaven and communicate with the spirit world. This might explain why he remained awake all night on May 19-20 before takeoff -- was it a Mithraic vigil at the final cusp of Taurus?

Of course, had French air aces Charles Nungesser and Francois Coli and their Levasseur biplane the "White Bird" not mysteriously vanished twelve days earlier, the whole thing might have been for naught; crossing the Atlantic first, nonstop, *and* solo was a profoundly magical act of boundary-breaking. Of course, Nungesser might have vanished into the Bermuda Triangle, or been gobbled up by etheric monsters -- or *intentionally* crossed into the Phantom Realm above the Atlantic skies. Lindbergh later reported seeing phantom islands in the Atlantic -- St. Brendan's Hy-Brazil? Atlantis?

The Rods, or the phantoms, were hardly Lindbergh's only brush with Very High Weirdness. His aide during his triumphal return tour of America was Donald Keyhoe, later author of *The Flying Saucers Are Real*, and Lindbergh himself buttonholed Carl Jung for a lengthy UFO chat in 1959. Lindbergh himself test-piloted a flying saucer, the Vought V-173 "flying pancake," in 1942. And, perhaps most famously (and intriguingly) he personally pulled strings and called in favors to get Robert Goddard's rocket workshop set up at Roswell, New Mexico in 1929. Was Goddard part of Lindbergh's communication with Those Above? Did they respond in 1947, trading three gray pilots for Nungesser and Coli? Did they respond again, sending UFOs over Lindbergh's childhood home in Little Falls, Minnesota, in 1979 and 1989?

"dear Sir! Have 50.000 \$ redy 25 000 \$ in 20 \$ bills 1.5000 \$ in 10 \$ bills and 10000 \$ in 5 \$ bills. After 2-4 days we will inform you were to deliver the Mony. We warn you for making anyding public or for notify the Police the child is in gut care. Indication for all letters are singnature and 3 holes."

-- first letter from Lindbergh baby kidnapper

Or did They require a darker sacrifice yet? On March 1, 1932, Charles Lindbergh, Jr., vanished from his crib in an

upstairs nursery in the Lindbergh mansion in Hopewell, New Jersey -- the note left was signed with a cryptic design of blue interlocking circles. Lindbergh took personal command of the investigation, with the assistance of Col. H. Norman Schwarzkopf (father of the future Gulf War general), head of the New Jersey State Police. Lead after lead was followed, and ransom after ransom was paid; even sleeping psychic Edgar Cayce was called in. Nine weeks later, searchers discovered the body of the Lindbergh baby buried about two miles from Hopewell. (The hasty autopsy and immediate cremation caused a number of "Lindbergh baby" claimants to surface later.) Although Cayce implicated "three men" (Modern [Magi](#) taking this "Child From The Sky" back with them this time? Men In Black?), authorities arrested carpenter Bruno Hauptmann and, after a trial infamous even at the time for procedural sloppiness and railroading, executed him on April 3, 1936.

That said, the preponderance of the evidence does indicate that Hauptmann was guilty, although Schwarzkopf always believed he had an accomplice and an "inside man." Some speculation centers on Lindbergh's butler, Aloysius Whateley (whose last name would be grounds for suspicion, were the Aerial Entities akin to Hastur or Yog-Sothoth); Lindbergh at the time thought it to be the work of a "gang." Al Capone offered to use his leverage to find the Lindbergh baby in exchange for a pardon; did he plan the daring kidnapping as leverage? Another author suggests that Elizabeth Morrow, Lindbergh's sister-in-law, killed the child in a fit of jealous insanity; and author Gregory Ahlgren suggests, most disturbingly of all, that Lindbergh did it himself either as a cruel hoax that got out of hand -- or in a rage at the baby's presumed deafness and deformed toes.

"It is always a pleasure to see good workmanship combined with vision in design and great technical ability. I have never been more impressed than I was with the aviation organizations I saw in Germany. I believe that the experimental laboratories which are being constructed will undoubtedly contribute very greatly to the progress of aviation throughout the world."

-- letter of Charles A. Lindbergh to Hermann Goering, August 20, 1936

Which were, of course, just the kind of toes the Nazis objected to. Lindbergh first toured Germany at the invitation of the German Air Ministry in 1936, stayed for the Olympic opener, and over-reported to American military officials the rise, size, and efficiency of Nazi air power. He was less easily fooled during a 1938 tour of the Soviet Union, but then he despised the Soviets as an "Asiatic horde." After the chaos of the kidnapping, Germany's orderly technocracy impressed him mightily, and he considered relocating to Berlin. (Had he not been in Berlin during Kristallnacht, which he considered embarrassing and silly, he might have done so.) He believed that Germany would win the war in Europe, which he considered foolish suicide by the white race. Lindbergh was never a Nazi -- his wife Anne Morrow Lindbergh summed up the couple's opinion perfectly when she called Hitler, Mussolini, and Stalin "scum on the wave of the future" -- but he was an imperfect democrat indeed. Hence, his duel against FDR over American isolationism.

He came by it somewhat honestly; his father Charles August Lindbergh began as a Progressive Congressman and vigorous opponent of World War One. Men in black-type goons actually broke up the plates of Congressman Lindbergh's books during the Wilsonian clampdown that sent other Progressives to jail. Such attacks and pressures drove Congressman Lindbergh into conspiracy theory and socialism, as he blamed the Money Trust for his sufferings. People like J.P. Morgan, he wrote, could never rest until all private wealth, especially gold, was in their hands. Intriguingly, Lindbergh paid his baby's ransom in gold certificates -- and FDR used the publicity to recall all gold certificates in circulation, and ban their possession. Particularly inventive conspiratologists claim that Lindbergh's enmity to FDR sprang from this moment -- perhaps FDR and the Illuminati pushed Lindbergh into alliance with Hitler.

"Carrel wrote to Lindbergh about creating a foundation devoted to 'the study of man.' It was meant to consider: the use of voluntary eugenics in the building up of a stronger human race; procedures to increase the nervous resistance of the individual; psychological, physiological, and chemical factors of spiritual growth; the problems of longevity; social and economic conditions that are 'indispensable to the life of an elite'; the possibility of raising human intelligence above its present level; the genesis of great leaders."

-- A. Scott Berg, *Lindbergh*

Lindbergh's fascination with eugenics came not only from his tangled family history, but from his association with pioneering doctor Alexis Carrel, winner of the Nobel Prize for his work in organ transplantation. Working with Carrel,

Lindbergh invented the first artificial heart, the Lindbergh Pump, in 1935. Carrel was a polymath, discussing ESP with Einstein or race betterment with Henry Ford. Lindbergh helped establish and sponsor Carrel's foundation, the prospectus of which reads like every creepy **GURPS Illuminati** sect imaginable: eugenics ("a stronger human race"), cybernetics ("increasing the nervous resistance of the individual"), the occult ("chemical factors of spiritual growth"), immortality ("the problems of longevity"), psionics ("raising human intelligence"), "social and economic conditions that are indispensable to the life of an elite," and -- perhaps -- a Sacred Bloodline ("the genesis of great leaders"). All this and reanimated body parts, too.

Lindbergh shared all of these interests; working on "etheric communication" and meeting British mystic Francis Younghusband, who had achieved illumination while invading [Tibet](#) in 1906 and now believed that ascending mountains (or flying the Atlantic solo?) put humans in touch with, literally, "higher intelligences." Lindbergh was also a Freemason, for those scoring at home, joining Keystone Lodge No. 243 in St. Louis; and painted a Masonic symbol on the ever-more-intriguingly-named *Spirit of St. Louis*. Intriguingly, Lindbergh's grandfather, August Lindbergh, was originally Swedish legislator and bank official Ola Månsson, before fleeing Sweden with his mistress in 1859 ahead of an embezzlement inquiry.

"Charles's grief, Anne discovered, was different from hers. He kept talking about the bigger picture, how they must find some way of making Time go backwards,' so they could reclaim who they were before this catastrophe . . . 'Everything is chance,' he said. 'You can guard against the high percentage of chance, but not against chance itself.'"
-- A. Scott Berg, *Lindbergh*

Ola Månsson was an intimate of the romantically inclined Crown Prince Charles (the future Charles XV) -- and rumor hinted that he had shared his mistress with her. Was Charles Lindbergh actually the true heir to the throne of Sweden? (If not, of course, he was still Charles MånssonŠ) Could the Lindbergh baby have actually been the Merovingian True King, a scion of the *Prieuré de Sion* bloodline? If not a Merovingian, perhaps the Månsson blood meant something -- Ola was born in 1808, during a fall of "star jelly" in Sweden. Could Lindbergh have been seeded here by the Sky People? Perhaps the kidnapping was a front-line struggle in the Secret Wars; all the misdirections and scoundrels involved agents of the warring Illuminati. Perhaps Lindbergh did fake the kidnapping, eventually smuggling his first-born son to Marconi's [Council of 98](#) city of super-science high atop the Andes Mountains. Could this American Dauphin still head a spiritual conspiracy of eugenically-perfected immortals using bionic Lindbergh Pump technology and flying UFOs? And if so -- whose side are they on? Well, just ask yourself one question. Do you feel lucky, Lindy?

Murphy's Rules



by John Kovalic

Murphy's Rules



Murphy's Rules





by Steve Kenson

Around the World in 80 Thrills is a four-part Cliffhangers adventure set in the 1930s (the popular "world on the brink of war" setting). This is the thrilling conclusion. Each part was written by a different author, making this also a Round Robin event:

- Part One: [The Kensington Codex](#) -- Steven Marsh
- Part Two: [The Steps of Chiushan](#) -- James Maliszewski
- Part Three: [The Minos Touch](#)-- Bob Portnell
- Part Four -- Steve Kenson

Stats are presented for **GURPS**. Additional stats appearing for **Fudge** presented in **bold italic red**. Stats for **Big Eyes, Small Mouth 2nd Edition** have also been presented in blue boxes with white text. The adventures should also be generic enough that they can be used in a variety of systems.

"When Suddenly . . ."

*There's nothing wrong with traveling in style, and the **Graf Zeppelin** offers the finest transatlantic travel in the world, from Europe to New Jersey. Of course, you're not traveling for pleasure. You're in pursuit of an English mercenary named Percival Aubrey-Smith, who stole two valuable archeological artifacts before heading across the Atlantic to America. You aim to recover the lost items and see that Aubrey-Smith pays for his crimes. But nothing says you can't enjoy yourself a little along the way.*

*You're doing just that in the **Graf Zeppelin's** sumptuous lounge when suddenly a shot rings out and a woman seated near the windows of the gondola screams as a group of armed men burst into the room. They level their Tommy-guns and a deep voice calls out, "All right, nobody move or everybody gets ventilated!" A large man in a heavy overcoat and fedora steps through the ranks of the gunmen, his dark eyes sweeping the room until they come to rest upon you.*

Option: Up in Smoke

If the adventure takes place in 1937, and the GM is feeling particularly cruel, the zeppelin the characters are on board can be the *Hindenburg* rather than the *Graf Zeppelin*. Both airships made transatlantic flights to New Jersey before the *Hindenburg's* spectacular destruction seriously dampened interest in travel by zeppelin. If the characters are on board the doomed airship, they can get off before the *Hindenburg* docks in Jersey (perhaps via the aforementioned plane Grancella planned to use for his escape). If not, then perhaps the fire that started on-board the zeppelin *wasn't* an accident. Perhaps it was another attempt to kill the player characters!

Giovanni Grancella

Age 35, 6', 195 lbs., black, slicked-back hair, dark brown eyes, small moustache. Wears a dark suit under an overcoat and a

"They're the ones," he says to the gunmen. "Take 'em."

What do you do?

Trouble in the Air

Unfortunately for the player characters, Percival Aubrey-Smith's employer is aware they are coming after him and has taken steps to ensure they don't cause any further problems. The man in the overcoat is Giovanni Grancella, a notorious Italian gangster, accompanied by several of his men (a number equal to the player characters). Grancella owes someone a favor and he's repaying it, by eliminating the player characters.

He orders his men to march the characters out of the room, barring the door behind them, then takes them to a hatch to throw them out into the middle of the Atlantic Ocean, where their bodies will never be found. He and his men will then escape using a plane moored below the zeppelin's gondola.

Of course, the player characters aren't likely to go along with this plan. They can get the drop of Grancella's goons by distracting them for a split-second. Then a fight breaks out. Grancella knocks aside the weapon of the first of his men who tries to shoot the characters. He yells, "What are you, stupid? This thing is full of hydrogen! Do you want to kill us all?" Hopefully this will remind the players of the dangers of gunplay in the zeppelin, making the melee a fistfight. Grancella tries to flee as soon as the heroes begin trouncing on his men. He'll take someone hostage, if necessary, to protect himself. If the heroes are traveling with Jill Spires from "The Kensington Codex," she makes a good candidate.

So What Is Really Going On?

As readers who have followed the first three *Around the World in 80 Thrills* adventures know, the heroes are on the trail of a series of mysterious crimes involving archeological artifacts, particularly a key recovered from an ancient tome and a stone that is supposedly the legendary Philosopher's Stone. They also know someone hired Percival Aubrey-Smith to acquire these items for an as yet unknown purpose.

The man behind it all is actually Professor Reginald Spires, Jill Spires' father, and the man who first contacted the heroes in "The Kensington Codex." Spires is secretly obsessed with uncovering evidence of the lost civilization of Atlantis, and he believes that the artifacts the heroes helped uncover, along with another discovery he has made,

fedora.

ST: 11 (*Fair*)
DX: 12 (*Good*)
IQ: 12 (*Good*)
HT: 10 (*Fair*)
Speed: 5.5; **Move:** 5
Dodge: 5
No encumbrance.

Advantages:
None.

Disadvantages:
Greed
Sense of Duty (to the Mafia).

Skills:
Brawling-12 (*Fair*)
Guns (various)-12 (*Fair*)
Knife-12 (*Fair*)
Stealth-10 (*Mediocre*)

Weapons: Pistol.

Body 4 Mind 5 Soul 4

Attack Combat Value: 4
Defense Combat Value: 2
Health Points: 40

Skills

Gun Combat (Pistol) -- 1, Melee Attack (Knife) -- 2

Mafia Goons

ST: 10 (*Fair*)
DX: 12 (*Good*)
IQ: 10 (*Fair*)
HT: 10 (*Fair*)
Speed: 5.5; **Move:** 5
Dodge: 5
No encumbrance.

Advantages:
None.

Disadvantages:
Various unpleasant mental disadvantages.

Skills:
Brawling-12 (*Fair*)
Guns (various)-12 (*Fair*)
Knife-12 (*Fair*)

are keys . . . not only to a great archeological discovery but also to untold power!

A few years ago, Spires experienced hypnotherapy to treat some headaches he was having. The hypnosis triggered a spontaneous regression in which Spires perceived himself as a philosopher-priest in ancient Atlantis, a civilization of technological and philosophical wonders. Although he tried to ignore the experience at first, he became more and more obsessed with it, but afraid to speak of it openly, knowing it would only bring him ridicule and professional ruin. Instead, he began to secretly search for evidence of the existence of Atlantis, gathering a substantial body of lore about the lost continent, most of it worthless.

Then Spires came upon the work of Edgar Cayce, a psychic known as the "sleeping prophet." Cayce claimed to have experienced past-lives in Atlantis as well and even predicted that evidence of Atlantis' existence would be found in the Bahamas. Spires contacted Cayce and the two began a correspondence that affirmed Spires' theories, and Cayce had several visions relating to Spires' work, which helped to guide him in the right direction.

Spires discovered ancient sites containing remnants of highly advanced technology. Rather than sharing his discoveries, however, he sank deeper into his personal delusions and became convinced it was his destiny to restore the glory of the Atlantean Empire, with him as its philosopher-king. He used his discoveries to build a secret fortune to continue his work, selling scraps of knowledge to criminal organizations and would-be inventors.

He was on the trail of the "key to it all" that Cayce said he might find in Minnesota when the events of "The Kensington Codex" occurred, leading him to call upon the help of the player characters. Since then, Spires has tried to use the heroes' efforts to help him in his quest, while keeping them from getting too close to the truth. He thought his man Aubrey-Smith had eliminated them in Crete at the end of "The Minos Touch," only to discover that they survived somehow.

Still, Spires has what he has been looking for according to Cayce's visions -- the Kensington Key and the Philosopher's Stone -- and they will lead him to the greatest treasure of all: the legendary Trident of Poseidon, an Atlantean artifact of immense power. With the trident, Spires can make his dream of a new Atlantean Empire come true, unless the heroes find a way to stop him, of course.

Yes, Virginia, There is a Sleeping

Stealth-10 (*Mediocre*)

Weapons: Tommy-guns, knives, saps, etc.

Body 4 Mind 4 Soul 3

Attack Combat Value: 3

Defense Combat Value: 1

Health Points: 35

Skills

Gun Combat (Pistol) -- 1, Melee Attack (Knife) -- 2, Unarmed Attack (Strikes) -- 1.

Option: It's Payback Time

If the characters went through "The Kensington Codex," Grancella might not have anything to do with the mystery the heroes are investigating. Instead he might be doing a favor for friends in the Chicago Mob as payback for the trouble the characters caused them in that adventure. Otherwise, Grancella is involved, although he has no idea what's really going on.

You Have Taken What I Have Rightfully Stolen

Astute readers may recall that at the end of the "Kensington Codex," Prof. Spires provided the characters with *copies* of the book and key, but that he kept the originals himself. Why did he have to have Aubrey-Smith steal them, then?

It's a simple matter of "no honor among thieves." Spires was dealing with the Black Pinnacle Society from "The Steps of Chiushan" and they got greedy for the technological secrets he had, so they stole the key and codex from him, forcing Spires to try and recover the copies he'd given the player characters without arousing their suspicions. (If the original key and codex remain missing, they could be hooks for future adventures, as the Black Pinnacle Society unravels their secrets.) If Aubrey-Smith failed to get the key or codex from the characters at the end of "The Minos Touch," then assume that Spires managed to recover the originals and proceeded with his plans.

Double Trouble

At this point, the heroes have seen doubles of people in both "The Steps of Chiushan" and now here. There's no real need for an explanation; it can simply be a bit of random weirdness. The default assumption is that Prof. Spires discovered a secret

Prophet

After the heroes deal with the danger posed by Giovanni Grancella and his thugs, the rest of their trip across the Atlantic is uneventful. They pick up Aubrey-Smith's trail in New Jersey, where they discover he headed south. They also find out that their friend Professor Spires has mysteriously vanished, along with the original Kensington Key and Codex. If the characters don't think to contact Professor Spires, Jill suggests it (if she's still with them), and is very concerned about her father's disappearance, fearing whoever is behind it has abducted him, too.

Spires has very carefully staged his disappearance, ransacking his own office and making it look like there was a struggle, although there are no witnesses and no one heard anything. If the characters want to rush to California to follow up on Spire's disappearance, remind them that they're hot on the trail of Aubrey-Smith and it's likely that the Professor's kidnapping and the theft of the artifacts are related. If they can find the British mercenary, he may be able to give them some answers. (Jill Spires mentions this if she's with the characters.)

The only clue they have is that Professor Spires placed a phone call to a Mr. Edgar Cayce in Virginia Beach, Virginia just hours before he disappeared. Jill doesn't know anything about Cayce, or her father's involvement with him, and says as much if the heroes inquire. They can find Cayce's address and telephone number with a little investigative work, making him their best lead. If one of the player characters makes a successful Occult roll, he's heard of Cayce, supposedly a very talented psychic and clairvoyant. Otherwise the characters know very little about the man.

Contacting Cayce

If the characters try to call Cayce, his wife Gertrude answers the telephone and tells them Edgar can't be disturbed right at the moment, and inquires as to the nature of their call. If they persist, they can get in touch with Cayce by phone in a few hours, but it makes them too late to stop his abduction (see below).

If the heroes tell Mr. Cayce they are friends of Prof. Spires, Cayce becomes cautious, because he knows Spires feared for his professional reputation, should word of their collaboration get out. If they tell Cayce about Spires' disappearance, he becomes more cooperative. He tells them that he and Professor Spires have been corresponding for nearly two years now, and that the Professor is keenly interested in the mysteries of ancient Atlantis. He offers to

Atlantean cloning technique, which he sold to some interested parties, including the Black Pinnacle Society from "The Steps of Chiushan." But if you prefer, there might be other reasons for the clones, from thought-projections to plastic surgery. If the clone element doesn't fit into the feel you want for the adventure, ignore it and replace the clones with ordinary thugs who may or may not happen to look a lot alike.

The Kidnappers

ST: 11 (*Fair*)
DX: 12 (*Good*)
IQ: 12 (*Good*)
HT: 10 (*Fair*)
Speed: 5.75; **Move:** 5
Dodge: 6
No encumbrance.

Advantages:
Combat Reflexes
Toughness.

Disadvantages:
Sense of Duty (to Employer, -5)
Overconfidence.

Skills:
Brawling-12 (*Good*)
Guns (Rifle)-12 (*Good*)
Guns (Pistol)-12 (*Good*)
Guns (Submachine Gun)-12 (*Good*)
Knife-12 (*Good*)
Stealth-13 (*Good*)

Weapons: Submachine Guns.

Note: The kidnappers are short-lived clones of the real Aubrey-Smith (from "The Minos Touch") and not as skilled or capable as the genuine article.

Body 4 Mind 5 Soul 4

Attack Combat Value: 4
Defense Combat Value: 2
Health Points: 40

Skills

Gun Combat (Pistol) -- 1, Melee Attack (Knife) -- 1, Stealth (Concealment) -- 1

Edgar Cayce

show Spires' letters to them, if they think they would be helpful. Jill Spires is surprised at this information. She knew nothing about her father's correspondence with Cayce or his interest in Atlantis.

If the heroes go to visit Cayce, it's a short flight from New Jersey to Virginia. But when they get to Cayce's home in Virginia Beach, they find trouble. A group of masked men are kidnapping Cayce! There are as many kidnappers as the PCs. They have a dark sedan parked in front of the house with the engine running and are hauling the psychic out, having dosed him and his wife with chloroform. When they see the heroes, the men open fire on them with the Tommy guns they're carrying, then try to pile Cayce into the sedan and drive off.

The scene can play out as a shootout between the thugs and the heroes, or a chase scene as the characters race after the getaway car (or both in succession, if you like). The thugs are more than willing to use Cayce as a hostage, but they're under strict orders not to harm him (which a Psychology roll might reveal, if a character has a chance to talk with the men to tell they're bluffing). Some quick action on the part of the heroes can save Cayce and nab his abductors. When captured, the men not already unconscious or dead pass out. Pulling off one's mask reveals that he's Percival Aubrey-Smith. But taking off the others' masks reveals *they're* Percival too! They all look identical! A moment later, the bodies begin to smoke and the men turn to ash, leaving only their clothing behind.

If the characters successfully rescue Cayce from his kidnappers, he gladly tells them all he can about his correspondence with Professor Spires. Jill, if she is with the characters, is eager for any information about her father, and surprised that he never mentioned to her that he knew Cayce.

The prophet responds that Professor Spires was concerned about his academic standing, but that he was quite sincerely interested in Cayce's visions about Atlantis, particularly one where he said information about Atlantis would be discovered near the Bahamas. Just recently (shortly before the start of "The Kensington Codex"), Cayce phoned Prof. Spires to tell him about a vision he had regarding the Kensington Key, which the characters found (or Spires found on his own, if the characters weren't in the first adventure).

It seems likely whoever has the Professor has gone to Bermuda to follow up Cayce's prediction. If the players don't come to this conclusion, Cayce can suggest it, mentioning that Spires felt he was very close to uncovering evidence of Atlantis. Perhaps Aubrey-Smith's mysterious

A thin, dignified man in his 50s with dark, receding hair, sunken eyes, somewhat large ears and wire-rimmed spectacles. He wears a dark, conservative suit.

ST: 9 (*Mediocre*)

DX: 10 (*Fair*)

IQ: 13 (*Good*)

HT: 10 (*Fair*)

Speed: 5; **Move:** 5

Dodge: 6

No encumbrance.

Advantages:

Autotrance

Empathy

ESP Power (Only while in a trance).

Disadvantages:

Sense of Duty (to help people with his psychic gifts)

Social Stigma (known psychic).

Skills:

Diagnosis-15 (*Great*)

Occult-12 (*Good*)

Precognition-15 (*Great*)

Psychometry-14 (*Good*)

Weapons: Tommy-guns, knives, saps, etc.

Body 3 Mind 5 Soul 6

Attack Combat Value: 4

Defense Combat Value: 2

Health Points: 45

Skills

Medical (Diagnosis) -- 1

Special Attributes

Precognition -- 2 (2 points)

Edgar Cayce was born in 1877 in Kentucky and demonstrated psychic abilities from a young age, including the ability to see people's auras. At age 21, he underwent hypnotherapy to treat laryngitis and discovered a talent for psychic diagnosis. He began giving psychic readings for others, diagnosing their symptoms and ailments from nothing more than a name and an address, despite no previous medical training or knowledge.

Eventually, his visions became more elaborate and he began to attribute ailments to karma from past lives. He had a number of past life visions in which he saw himself as an Atlantean, an Egyptian priest, a Persian ruler, a Trojan warrior, and many others. He believed in the existence of Atlantis, and in extraterrestrial life. He received a vision to move to Virginia Beach with his family in 1928 and established the Association

employer is searching for the same thing. "If so," Cayce says, "the results could be disastrous. There are powers from the ancient world that mankind has yet to imagine. They must not fall into the wrong hands." Cayce will go with the characters to Bermuda if they ask him to.

If the characters fail to rescue Cayce, his wife offers to let them examine her husband's letters for clues as to who might have taken him. They can get the above information by reading through the letters Cayce and Prof. Spires exchanged, including Spires' increasing interest in Bermuda. Jill again expresses surprise that her father never mentioned this correspondence to her before, but she can verify that the handwriting of the letters is her father's.

Pirates of the Caribbean

One way or another, the characters should come to the conclusion that Bermuda should be their next stop. If they don't, then Jill Spires or Edgar Cayce can suggest it (if either of them is present). It doesn't take long for the characters to catch a flight to Florida, then charter a boat or plane out to Bermuda. This scene should start with the characters already in the islands, searching for Prof. Spires and the British mercenary Aubrey-Smith. If you want to extend the events of the adventure, the characters might face some additional trouble getting to the islands, including sabotage of their plane or bad weather.

Although it's only a small collection of islands, Bermuda offers a lot of coastline for the characters to search. If they have Edgar Cayce with them, things are a bit easier, as the psychic has a strong "feeling" of the right direction for them to go in. At the GM's option, player characters with occult or paranormal abilities might get the same "gut feeling" guiding them toward their destination. Otherwise, the characters have to do some old-fashioned detective work to find their quarry. Fortunately, they can turn up some information in a waterfront dives about a British man fitting Aubrey-Smith's description hiring some local men for an undisclosed job off of Bimini, the westernmost islands. Characters can get this information with a few small bribes and some successful Carousing, Diplomacy, or Fast-Talk rolls, or a bar-fight, depending on the inclinations of the GM and the players.

Follow the Bimini Road

Spires and his men are making their way out to the Bimini Road, an unusual phenomenon off the coast of North Bimini. The "road" is a collection of regular square blocks of white stone extending in a straight line for over 600 yards, some 20 feet below the water's surface, and a few

for Research and Enlightenment (ARE) in 1931, the same year he predicted that evidence of Atlantis would be found in the Bahamas.

Cayce is an earnest man who wants nothing more than to help others with his gifts. He believes firmly in his visions and in his work, ignoring the scorn of skeptics. He's unaware of the depths of Professor Spires' ambition, and thinks of him as a fellow seeker after truth. Cayce is the GM's ace-in-the-hole in this adventure; his psychic abilities allow him to pass on hints and useful information to the players when necessary. But, like most prophets, his visions can be cryptic and vague, rather than providing direct answers.

Option: The Lovecraft Connection

Call of Cthulhu Keepers -- or GMs interested in a more horror-oriented adventure -- can easily substitute Howard Phillips Lovecraft for Edgar Cayce in this adventure. Lovecraft was known for having visions in dreams (some of which were the basis for his famous Mythos stories), and corresponded with a number of people over mutual interests. Lovecraft lived in Rhode Island, rather than Virginia, requiring only a slight change of scene.

In this sort of adventure, of course, Prof. Spires is likely driven by visions of alien landscapes and non-Euclidean geometries to seek out something best left undisturbed. The thugs can be members of a Cthulhoid cult or strange homunculi created by a blasphemous combination of science and forbidden sorcery (requiring a SAN roll when they dissolve horribly). And the sunken land Spires seeks is probably not Atlantis, but R'leyh. For more information on the adventure possibilities of Lovecraft, see *GURPS Who's Who 1* (p. 122-123) and the *Call of Cthulhu* RPG from Chaosium.

Pirates

ST: 10 (*Fair*)
DX: 12 (*Good*)
IQ: 10 (*Fair*)
HT: 10 (*Fair*)
Speed: 5; **Move:** 5
Dodge: 6
No encumbrance.

Advantages:
None.

Disadvantages:
Various mental disads like Greed and Code of Honor (Pirate's).

Skills:
Boating-12 (*Fair*)

hundred yards from shore. With the clarity of the Caribbean waters, the road is clearly visible from the air or from a boat positioned directly over it. Prof. Spires believes the Bimini Road is a remnant of an Atlantean structure, and that he now has the means of finding it. (For more information on the Bimini Road, see the links section or *GURPS Places of Mystery*, p. 13.)

Of course, Spires has anticipated the possibility (however slight) that he might be followed, so he's paid off a group of local pirates to keep other boats away from the area while he investigates the Bimini Road. He and Aubrey-Smith don scuba gear and dive down to the road, where the Philosopher's Stone acquired in Crete begins to glow. Ideally, the player characters should show up just as the Professor and Aubrey-Smith (and Cayce, if he's with them) head underwater. A pair of speedboats each holding four men come roaring at the player characters' boat, opening fire on them. If the characters made their way to Bimini by plane, then their attackers are a boat and a seaplane, both with armed men.

The characters have to avoid the pirates, as well as rocky shallows and any other hazards you care to throw their way. The scene should be an exciting chase ending in the destruction of the pirates (preferable in a spectacular explosion of some kind). Or the characters' boat might be destroyed, allowing the characters to play dead until the pirates leave (but forcing them to deal with the additional complication of a great white shark attracted by the fight).

Terror from the Sea

Once they've dealt with the pirates, the heroes can get on board or pull up alongside Spires' boat, a small cabin cruiser. When the characters get to the boat they notice two things immediately. First, there is a glowing light coming from the end of the Bimini Road, visible through the water. Second, there is a scratching sound coming from the hull of the boat.

Suddenly, a group of skeletons lurch over the side of the boat! They're covered in tattered, rotten clothing, corroded bronze bracelets, and festooned with dripping kelp, each armed with a rusty (but functional) sword. They look like they just stepped out of a Ray Harryhausen film.

The skeletons are the guardians of the gateway, but allowed the Professor to pass because he carried the Philosopher's Stone. The heroes, however, do not. The skeletons lurch forward to destroy them and fight until they are themselves destroyed. There should be at least one skeleton for every player character, plus an additional one

Brawling-12 (*Fair*)
Guns-12 (*Fair*)
Knife-12 (*Fair*)
Stealth-10 (*Mediocre*)
Swimming-12 (*Fair*)

Weapons: Submachine guns.

Body 4 Mind 4 Soul 4

Attack Combat Value: 4
Defense Combat Value: 2
Health Points: 40

Skills

Gun Combat (Pistol) -- 1, Melee Attack (Knife) -- 1,
Swimming (Scuba) -- 1

Great White Shark

ST: 40 (*Great, Scale+3*)
DX: 12 (*Good*)
IQ: 3 (*Poor, Scale-3*)
HT: 12/35 (*Good, Scale+1*)
Speed: 9; **Move:** 9
Dodge: 6
Damage: 2d+1 cutting.

Body 8 Mind 0 Soul 4

Attack Combat Value: 4
Defense Combat Value: 2
Health Points: 55

Skills

Melee Attack (Bite) -- 4, Swimming (Speed) -- 2

Special Attributes:

Melee Attack (30 points of damage)

Skeletons

ST: 9 (*Fair*)
DX: 12 (*Good*)
IQ: 7 (*Poor*)
HT: 10 (*Fair*)
Speed: 5.5; **Move:** 6
Dodge: 6

or two. If the characters are overcoming the skeletons too quickly, you can always have a few more climb up out of the water to attack them.

The Gateway

The shining light at the end of the Bimini Road forms a sort of gateway characters can pass through. Professor Spires left the gate open in his eagerness when he passed through it, allowing the characters to follow. The gateway is beneath only twenty feet of warm, tropical water, so any character able to swim can reach it easily. Although he can swim, Cayce prefers to remain behind, although Jill Spires will go with the characters, if she's there. If you want to make things a bit more difficult for them, you can throw in some more skeleton pirates to guard it underwater, or use the shark from the previous scene if you didn't get to before.

Once the characters pass through the gate they find themselves . . . elsewhere.

Secrets of the Lost World

The characters emerge from the gateway in a strange place. It is a plaza paved in white marble, surrounded by ruins made up of a mix of classical styles (with Egyptian, Greek, and Babylonian influences predominant). The sky is a neutral gray color that's hard to look at for long. The buildings all show signs of great age (although not weathering) and seem to have been toppled by an earthquake or similar disaster. There's a structure like a Greek temple at one end of the plaza, the most intact of all the buildings. Its massive bronze doors stand open and a trail of water leads toward it.

Sorry, Old Chap

When the heroes move toward the temple, a group of skeletons emerge from the ruins to surround them. Unlike the ones they encountered outside the gate, these creatures are carrying shields and wearing ancient-looking metal armor, giving them +6 PD (for a Block total of 10) and DR 4 [+2 Defense Combat Value and Heavy Armour Level 1 in *BESM*]. There should be at least half again as many skeletons as there are player characters (up to twice as many or more, if the GM thinks the PCs really outclass the skeletons). The characters should feel outnumbered.

A hearty chuckle comes from the open temple doors and Percival Aubrey-Smith emerges, holding the glowing Philosopher's Stone in his hand.

No encumbrance.

Advantages:

-2 damage (and no bonus damage) from missile, beam, and impaling attacks.
+1 Move (added in above)

Disadvantages:

Various mental disads like Greed and Code of Honor (Pirate's).

Skills:

Broadsword-12 (*Fair*)

Note: For more detailed information on undead skeletons, see *GURPS Undead*, p. 78-80.

Body 4 Mind 0 Soul 0

Attack Combat Value: 1

Defense Combat Value: 0

Health Points: 30

Attributes: Damn Healthy! (+10 Health Points), Focused Damage (Sword, +5 points)

Skills

Melee Attack (Sword) -- 4

Percival Aubrey-Smith

Mid-forties, average height and weight, balding, gray eyes, immaculate pencil-thin mustache, upper-class British accent

ST: 11 (*Fair*)

DX: 12 (*Good*)

IQ: 12 (*Good*)

HT: 11 (*Fair*)

Speed: 5.75; **Move:** 5

Dodge: 6

No encumbrance.

Advantages:

Combat Reflexes
Charisma +1
Language Talent +2
Alertness +2
Toughness.

Disadvantages:

Sense of Duty (to Employer, -5)
Overconfidence
Secret (high-profile assassin, -20).

Skills:

"Useful little thing, eh?" he says with a snide smile. "Apparently it controls them somehow," he nods toward the skeleton warriors, "among other things. I'm impressed you've made it this far, but this is the end of the road for you."

The British mercenary is enjoying the opportunity to gloat, and smart characters can draw him out by engaging him in conversation. Percy won't reveal the identity of his employer, but he will mention that he's "gone ahead to secure our prize" and he'll reveal that he still has the Kensington Key he took from the characters in "The Minos Touch." He'll also offer the lovely Jill Spires the chance to escape alive if she wants, but she'll disdain his advances, saying she'd rather die than owe her life to him.

"As you wish, my dear," Percy says. Then he raises the Stone and commands the skeletons to kill them all. The player characters can fight the skeletons, but it should be a difficult fight, particularly since their opponents are largely immune to gunfire (to say nothing of pain).

A smarter tactic is to take the Philosopher's Stone away from Aubrey-Smith somehow. The skeletons block any attempt to reach the mercenary directly, but characters can try to shoot the Stone out of his hand (at -5 to skill) or use any special abilities they might possess. Percy isn't helpless, either. In addition to his combat skills (and the pistol he carries in his other hand), he can also use the Philosopher's Stone to cast a Flesh to Stone spell at skill 13 (Good), up to three times. The spell can be reversed using the Stone (at the same skill level) or by destroying the Stone. The Stone itself is DR 3 and has 10 Hit Points before it shatters into useless fragments. If the Philosopher's Stone is taken away from Aubrey-Smith (or destroyed) the skeletons stop fighting and collapse into piles of bones and armor.

The Truth Revealed

Once they've dealt with Aubrey-Smith and the skeletons, the heroes can make their way into the temple building, following the trail of the mysterious mastermind behind it all. The wet footprints lead down into a chamber beneath the temple, a vaulted room supported by soaring columns with an altar-like structure at the far end. Above the altar is a frieze of a stern, bearded man wearing a crown. As the characters enter the chamber, they see a dark figure silhouetted against the light coming from a crystal sitting in a golden stand on the altar. The crystal is quartz-like, vaguely in the shape of a trident, with two points splitting off from the main cluster near the top, and glowing with an

Guns (Rifle)-15 (*Great*)
Guns (Pistol)-15 (*Great*)
Guns (Submachine Gun)-15 (*Great*)
Knife-14 (*Good*)
Leadership-12 (*Fair*)
Merchant-12 (*Fair*)
Stealth-14 (*Good*)
Acting-14 (*Good*)
Savoir-Faire-14 (*Good*)
Streetwise-13 (*Good*)
Piloting (Seaplane)-14 (*Good*)
7 pts. in other skills

Languages:

French-16 (*Great*)
English-16 (*Great*)
German-16 (*Great*)
Spanish-16 (*Great*)

Weapons: Pistol, the Philosopher's Stone.

Body 4 Mind 5 Soul 5

Attack Combat Value: 5
Defense Combat Value: 3
Health Points: 45

Attributes: Combat Mastery -- 1, Heightened Awareness -- 1

Skills

Gun Combat (Pistol) -- 2, Linguistics (French, German, Spanish) -- 3, Melee Attack (Knife) -- 2, Melee Defense (Knife) -- 2, Piloting (Light Airplane) -- 1, Ranged Defense (Personal) -- 2, Unarmed Attack (Strikes) -- 2, Unarmed Defense (Strikes) --2, Stealth (Sneaking) -- 2

Option: The Femme Fatale Ending

GMs looking for a twist on the above can have Jill Spires turn out to be the mastermind behind it all, rather than her father! She's been manipulating everyone and the attacks and kidnap attempts on her during the adventures were merely red herrings so the heroes wouldn't suspect her. In the climatic scene, she seeks to claim the crystal and shoots her father in cold blood with a pistol the characters didn't know she had. Then she tries to take the crystal for herself, with pretty much the same results as above.

Professor Reginald Spires

inner light.

When the characters enter, light flares from the eyes of the frieze and shoots out at them, trapping them in some sort of impenetrable force field. Nothing the characters have can break through they field. They're rendered quite immobile. The dark figure turns toward them, pulling off the hood of his wetsuit to reveal . . . Professor Reginald Spires! Jill Spires gasps as her father smiles at them. "Well, you're just in time to witness the outcome of years of research and work." He gestures toward the crystal. "There lies the greatest scientific discovery of all time! Not only positive proof of the existence of Atlantis, but a container, a vessel holding the collected knowledge of those ancient philosopher-kings, discoveries you can scarcely imagine! And now it is mine!"

The heroes can interrupt the Professor's monologue with questions or comments of their own. Spires has been working in secret for quite some time now and he's also a megalomaniac. He's dying for someone he can explain his brilliance to. So he'll take any opening the characters give him to lay out the details of his plan, filling in anything the characters haven't figured out yet. He points out how he manipulated the heroes into helping him recover the Kensington Key, and how he kept them off-balance the whole time while gathering the things he needed to reach this ancient Atlantean outpost. He makes it quite clear that he intends to use the knowledge contained in the crystal to make himself philosopher-king of a new Atlantean empire, and that he'll have to dispose of the heroes unless, of course, they're willing to join him.

When Spires reaches for the crystal, a voice booms out in the chamber, coming from the frieze above the altar. "Hold!" it says. "Who enters the sacred Temple of Poseidon and seeks to claim the Crystal of Knowledge?"

"I, Reginald Spires, philosopher-king of a new age!" the Professor responds.

"And are you worthy of the wisdom of the ages, Reginald Spires?" the voice asks.

"I am!" The Professor affirms.

"And what of you others?" the voice asks the heroes. "Do you come to claim the Crystal?" If none of the characters answer in the affirmative, then the voice calls for Spires to take up the crystal, which he does eagerly.

If one or more of the characters say they've come to claim the crystal as well, then the eyes of the carving flare and the force field around them vanishes. "Then let a challenger come forward!" the voice says, calling one of the

ST: 10 (*Fair*)
DX: 12 (*Good*)
IQ: 15 (*Superb*)
HT: 11 (*Fair*)
Speed: 5.75; **Move:** 5
Dodge: 5
No encumbrance.

Advantages:
Charisma +1
Strong Will +2.

Disadvantages:
Megalomania
Secret (Criminal mastermind).

Skills:
Acting-14 (*Great*)
Archeology-15 (*Great*)
Guns (Pistol)-12 (*Good*)
Leadership-12 (*Fair*)
Merchant-12 (*Fair*)
Occult-15 (*Great*)
Streetwise-13 (*Good*)

Languages: Ancient Greek-15 (*Great*)
French-15 (*Great*)
English-15 (*Great*)
Latin-15 (*Great*)
German-15 (*Great*)
Spanish-15 (*Great*)

Weapons: Pistol.

Body 4 Mind 7 Soul 6

Attack Combat Value: 5
Defense Combat Value: 3
Health Points: 50

Skills
Gun Combat (Pistols) -- 1, Linguistics (Ancient Languages) -- 4, Ranged Defense (Personal) -- 1, Social Sciences (Archeology) -- 4

Jill Spires

ST: 10 (*Fair*)
DX: 11 (*Fair*)
IQ: 13 (*Good*)
HT: 11 (*Fair*)
Speed: 5.5; **Move:** 5

characters to come and stand beside Spires. "May the strongest mind conquer!" it says, and a beam from each eye strikes Spires and the character, who must engage in a Contest of Wills. The loser passes out. The winner is encouraged to take up the crystal.

However, unknown to Spires, the whole thing is an elaborate trap. The correct answer to the guardian's question is to claim to be *unworthy* of the Crystal of Knowledge, for the Atlantean philosopher-kings understood the value of humility. Anyone who takes the crystal claiming to be worthy of it has his mind and sanity destroyed by a flood of knowledge too great for anyone to bear. So if Spires is unopposed, or wins the Contest of Wills, he seizes the crystal in triumph, then screams as its light washes over him. If a player character wins the Contest and tries to claim the crystal the same thing happens to him (it doesn't pay to get greedy in these situations).

The moment someone takes the crystal, the temple begins to crumble. In moments it is collapsing. Jill tries to reach her father but a multi-ton block of stone plunges down between them. The heroes have to run for the gate to get out before the entire place comes down. Outside in the plaza a tremor collapses the remaining ruins and the "sky" above rains fire down on the remains. After the characters plunge through the gate, it vanishes, sending a geyser of water up from the Bimini Road then tend lapses into silence.

Epilogue

In the end, the heroes should come away with some great stories and little else. The mysterious gateway at the end of the Bimini Road has vanished and there seems to be no means to bring it back. The temple and all it contained is lost (including Professor Spires, Aubrey-Smith, and probably the Philosopher's Stone). Jill Spires decides to devote herself to the science of archeology, for the *good* of mankind, and may be a future ally (or love interest). Edgar Cayce returns to his home and his prophecies, perhaps offering the characters a cryptic hint about their future in parting. If the heroes manage to hang on to any of the artifacts (particularly the Philosopher's Stone), it's up to the GM what (if any) powers they retain.

The heroes get to spend some time on the beautiful beaches of the Caribbean, relaxing and sunning themselves before the call to adventure and excitement lures them away. But this tale of their adventures is over, for now.

Dodge: 5

No encumbrance.

Advantages:

Beautiful
Charisma +1.

Disadvantages:

Sense of Duty (to her father).

Skills:

Archeology-13 (*Good*)
Guns-11 (*Fair*)
Merchant-12 (*Fair*)
Stealth-12 (*Fair*)
Savoir-Faire-12 (*Good*)

Languages:

French-12 (*Good*)
English-12 (*Good*)
German-12 (*Good*)

Weapons: Usually none.

Body 4 Mind 6 Soul 5

Attack Combat Value: 5

Defense Combat Value: 3

Health Points: 45

Skills

Gun Combat (Pistol) -- 1, Linguistics (Ancient Languages) -- 2, Ranged Defense (Personal) -- 1, Social Sciences (Archeology) -- 2, Stealth (Concealment) -- 1

Note: If you're using the Femme Fatale option (above), feel free to improve Jill's stats to make her a suitable villainess.

Paranormal Powers and Super-Science

Depending on the style of pulp campaign you are running the player characters may have extraordinary abilities beyond those of mortal men. This may include various low-level super powers and weird science gadgetry. In this case, you can assume that Prof. Spires uncovered sufficient Atlantean trinkets, psychic secrets, and super-science to give him powers to counter those of the player characters. One of these is an amulet or device that completely protects the Professor from

Further Adventures

Like any good serial, there are plenty of hooks left over for intrepid GMs looking to plan future adventures for our heroes:

- The characters should still have a copy of the Kensington Codex and Key from the first adventure. While the Atlantean temple is lost, it's possible the Codex may contain other information useful to the characters, and that the key may open other locks they have yet to discover. Someone might try to take either or both from them in order to find out.
- Professor Spires made a number of discoveries that he sold on the black market to finance his work. With Jill Spires' assistance, the characters might find the Professor's records, indicating whom he sold what to, allowing them to track down various mystic trinkets and super-science items that have fallen into the wrong hands (like the Black Pinnacle Society in "The Steps of Chiushan"). This can be the basis of a series or even a short campaign.
- The American Mafia, the Italian Mafia, and the Chinese Triads all have reasons to be less than happy with the characters (to say nothing of the Nazis, from "The Minos Touch"). Any of them might pursue a vendetta against the characters, or simply try and find out what they were up to, stumbling across some of Prof. Spires secrets in the process.
- Now that the characters know there is at least *some* truth to the Atlantis legend, they might choose to pursue it. The temple Spires found was only an outpost; there may be others like it hidden around the world. Was the temple responsible in some way for the strangeness of the Bermuda Triangle? Will it stop now that the temple is gone, or get worse? Are the people, ships, and planes that have vanished into the Triangle in some "pocket dimension" like the temple? Are the ruins of the real city-state of Atlantis out there somewhere just waiting to be found?
- And, of course, it would be *impossible* that Professor Spires survived the collapse of the Atlantean temple (after all, *no one* could have survived that!). But, if he did, then a madman with fragmentary knowledge of ancient Atlantean science and magic, and the location of other outposts around the world, would be a dangerous nemesis for the characters to encounter in the future . . .

mind-reading and similar effects that would reveal his perfidy too early in the adventure. (Although it provides him no advantage in the contest of wills over the Trident of Poseidon, unless you feel the player characters need a handicap.)

Likewise, you may want to beef up the powers of the Philosopher's Stone, making Aubrey-Smith into a low-level super-villain while wielding it. Perhaps it can transmute and animate all sorts of matter rather than just turning flesh into stone and commanding skeletons.

Links

- **The Graf Zeppelin:** <http://www.ciderpresspottery.com/ZLA/greatzeps/german/GrafZeppelin.html>
- **Edgar Cayce:** <http://www.are-cayce.com/>
- **The Bimini Road & Atlantis:** <http://www.funandsun.com/1tocf/inf/bim/bimini.html>



Something Rich and Strange

by Phil Masters

*Full fathom five thy father lies;
Of his bones are coral made:
Those are pearls that were his eyes:
Nothing of him that doth fade,
But doth suffer a sea-change
Into something rich and strange.*
-- William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*.

The point about *GURPS Atlantis* is that Atlantis is what you make of it -- or what other people have made of it over the last couple of thousand years.

The brief for the book was pretty simple, and quite broad; a treatment of Atlantis -- the *Atlantis Myth* -- in game terms. That made me decide to try and avoid getting too specific in the opening chapters; with everything from Greek philosophy to superhero comics to worry about, it would have felt unfair to pin readers down to a single viewpoint too early on. However, gamers have a natural and justified aversion to vague and waffly generalizations in game books, so the second half of the book, the last three of its six chapters, consists of game-usable treatments of Atlantis. ("Worked examples," in Bill Stoddard's felicitous phrase.)

By the Book

The other thing I wanted was to try to be quite *rigorous* about some things. This is a bit of a habit among *GURPS* writers and fans, to the extent that it sometimes becomes a joke, but while I was prepared to be cinematic and dramatic, I found some of the secondary source material on which I had to draw rather annoying. To explain: "Atlantis" is an idea with a clearly-defined first known manifestation. It's all there in the surviving works of Plato. And yet, many later uses of the name more or less completely ignore Plato, and go their own way with this idea of a lost land under the sea. Well, that can be entertaining enough, but I decided to stick to Plato's sometimes weird images as closely as possible. This had the added virtue of making chapter 1 easier to write; this is, so far as I know, the first RPG supplement where the Father of Western Philosophy really deserves an "Additional Material" credit. Though it'd be hard to ship him his comps (and I doubt that he'd approve of RPGs anyway).

On the other hand, the more generalized image of the Lost Land clearly has great appeal, so while chapter 1 went back to Plato and went over his ideas in detail, chapter 2 looked at the alternatives and spin-offs -- the odd little tales of drowned towns from along the coasts of northern Europe, Arabia's "Atlantis of the Sands," the dingbat imagery of the Theosophists, and so on. Then, the idea of rigor gave me another angle. As numerous modern writers have realized,

the invention of undersea travel makes *visiting* a sunken Atlantis a somewhat-viable proposition. But there's more to venturing underwater than a facemask and a pair of flippers per PC. So chapter 3 is about the sea itself -- the vast, dangerous, bizarre environment that happens to cover most of the surface of our home planet. Here, I was traveling out of my own familiar environment, so I recruited some helpful assistance through the *Pyramid* boards, which in turn ensured that the book would include some detailed and interesting treatments of subjects which *GURPS* has only discussed in passing before -- subjects like the evolution of submarine technology, and the complex dangers of deep diving.

(Talking of rigor -- the more research I did for this chapter, the more exasperated I became with all too many writers and films. It soon became clear to me that deep-sea exploration is a complex and risky enterprise. Cinematic writers may be entitled to skip over some of the practical problems, but all too often they give the impression that they just plain don't know and don't care. This book tries to make realistic games involving deep dives a little easier to run -- which should mean that they can be as tough on the PCs as realism demands.)

Anyway, that was the set-up; the worked examples then took Atlantis back into high fantasy, out into the twisted world of conspiracy theory, and off into the weirdness of steampunk or supers stories. Which done, the book went into the invaluable process of playtesting.

One More Theme . . .

During which, one theme was mentioned occasionally which I hadn't covered much, and which, I'm afraid, I couldn't justify covering much more in the final draft. (*GURPS* book projects work to a page count.) That theme was, broadly, "Atlantis of the Future." A class of myths that's lasted this well surely doesn't have to end here.

Traveller

For one thing, some people came up with ideas for merging ideas from this book with *GURPS Traveller*, which I *did* manage to use in partial, truncated form. One involved space travelers -- Droyne or Vegans, most likely -- lurking on our world in the Bronze Age; I do find the idea of Odysseus and his crew meeting a "one-eyed" Vegan amusing, if slightly implausible. (Really, Droyne/Ancients make better candidates for the role of Secret Atlanteans.) Another playtester suggested using the myth as a model for events on a Vilani-occupied world during the Long Night; a PC party gets sent to look for artifacts that were placed there during the fall of the First Imperium, only to discover that terraforming or climatic shifts have rendered their maps largely useless, and the old colony was located in a deep valley that's now completely flooded. Here, as usual when playing with "sunken Atlantis survives" stories, we have to assume implausibly rugged domes and logically-previously- superfluous life support systems, but there's always ways round that sort of thing, and it *does* get us an interesting place to visit.

Disasters Closer to Home

Another thread that I wasn't able to exploit properly in the final draft of the book looked at our own world, and asked which familiar cities we could sink. The prosaic snag with this subject is that we can't sink most of them more than a few feet, even with every known flood defense overwhelmed by catastrophic events and worst-case global warming. Somehow, wading knee-deep through the streets of an abandoned London lacks the sort of melodrama we've come to expect from a neo-Atlantis story, and "fell into a swamp" doesn't sound as good as "sank beneath the waves." Holland was noted as one country in a really confrontational position with regard to the sea; apparently, bits of it would be 20 feet under if all the dykes collapsed. Other cities at or below sea level were mentioned -- Miami, Bahrain, Dhaka, Bangkok -- as well as the good old possibility of California being hit by a big enough earthquake and falling into the Pacific, but the candidates that looked best was those which scored highest for *style*.

Venice is an obvious name here, of course, being a city of canals, with severe flooding problems, as it is; somebody threw in the idea of a drowned Venice inhabited only by vampires, which has a certain gothic charm. It was also pointed out that modern Cairo is more or less at sea level; given a rise of just a few feet, the entire Nile delta might flood. Alexandria, on the current coast of the delta, would obviously suffer badly; the great city of the Hellenic era is

already largely under the harbor, for one reason or another, and that comes complete with the classical architecture that Atlantis imagery demands. Near-future scenarios in such a setting could combine cyberpunk glitz, Middle Eastern intrigue, and sunken-city melancholy.

Meanwhile, another thread was addressing the subject of New Orleans -- a city located, by some genius of an urban planner, not only in a swamp, but also below sea level. Actually, the subject of possible threats to that city proved complex (so that we were treated to the unusual sight of RPG fans admitting that they weren't entirely sure what the results of a particular development would be), but the first place anyone looked for trouble was a set of river control projects north of the city. One projection was that if they were lost, the river would silt up, destroying its usefulness as a port; then, knock-on effects involving deposition and erosion patterns on the coast would cause the Mississippi delta to erode away, so that New Orleans eventually flooded. This would take a while; someone suggested that the place might be under a dome (and hence even more humid) by then, leading to more proper quasi-Atlantean imagery. (Don't ask why anyone would build such a dome instead of fixing the flood prevention measures.) Anyway, New Orleans's somewhat louche reputation seemed to make some people think that it was a natural target for disasters.

Which is wandering away from Plato's tale, perhaps. But that's what happens when you go looking for a philosophical metaphor in the middle of the ocean; you get your feet wet.

The Dawning of the Age of . . . Atlantis?

It took days to reach and explore the inner chambers. The undersea equipment was cumbersome and difficult to navigate through the fabled sunken city. But the explorers' search was methodical, as wonder after wonder was cataloged.

One room seemed to shine with a brilliant light all its own. Only when the last person entered did they feel a bristle on the inside of their skin as reality melted away . . .

. . . into a rest stop on I-96. They stepped outside, disoriented. Removing the undersea breathing apparatus from his mouth, team leader Kennings muttered, "What the hell?" as a '67 Chevy drove by. Its bumper sticker said, "Come Back, President Truman! All Is Forgiven!"

"Where are we?" asked Doctor Perkins.

"Not where," said Max the engineer. "When."

Ingredients

Are We Now Yet?

Although designed with Atlantis in mind, this adventure seed will work with any secluded, difficult-to-reach but desirable locale.

The premise is as described above: The heroes step into a large chamber in Atlantis, and are transported somewhere else.

March of 1968, to be precise.

The exact day and time of March corresponds to the day it was when the heroes stepped into the chamber. Thus if they entered on May 17th, 2001, they will emerge on March 17th, 1968. If they enter on June 23rd, 2055, they'll emerge on March 23rd, 1968. (Clever or mathematically inclined GMs can come up with different formulae, but this one was chosen for simplicity.)

Where they emerge seems to be random. It is always outside of public view, and out of danger (relatively). Of course, the equipment that was required to access Atlantis may well prove to be a liability; how *do* you explain full undersea gear when you emerge from an office in McCarthy's New Hampshire primary headquarters?

This Is Big . . .

Of course, the out-of-game reason for this is to plop the heroes down in a completely alien time . . . one that has a lot of roleplaying and adventure potential. 1968 was a particularly tumultuous time for the United States and the world (see sidebar). And depending on when the original adventure takes place, many of the PCs may have personal subplots they would wish to pursue, given this opportunity. This opportunity to meddle may be too great for the party to resist.

The GM, then, will need to determine to what extent (if any) time can be altered. In particular, consider what alternate timelines might come into being. A group

1968

B-52 bomber
with four
January 22 hydrogen
bombs crashes
in Greenland

that enters the chamber in June 21st, 2001 will arrive on March 21st, 1968 . . . is this the same timeline as a group that leaves July 2nd, 2010, thus arriving on March 2nd, 1968? Can they meet? (Although it *is* a big world, and the odds of two groups randomly meeting each other are slight, if one group is aware of the possibility of the other then they might try tracking them.) Can the future be altered? If so, do heroes need to worry about their time altering or ceasing to be? Can they meet younger versions of themselves . . . or other future versions of themselves using the portal again? *GURPS Time Travel* will prove invaluable here in sorting out these ideas.

Some things to consider:

- Time passes normally in the "original" timeline at the same rate it does in 1968. Thus spending two months in 1968 will cause two months to pass in the time the party came from.
- A party will always travel together. Unless extraordinary methods are taken (such as dividing a party into two groups, one of which specifically doesn't step into the chamber until waiting an hour or two), the entire group will teleport to the same place.
- Groups won't intersect. If extraordinary methods *are* taken, the two (or more) groups will be separate; as such they will appear in diverse secluded places.

Cooking Tips

The Leap Home

After mucking around 1968 for a while, the thought may occur to the heroes: How do we get home?

Well, if there are no other means of time travel in the game (and this seed probably works best if there isn't), then the answer is simultaneously simple yet complicated:

The same way they got there.

If the party *returns* to Atlantis while in 1968, and steps into that same chamber, they will arrive back in their own time . . . advanced (of course) by whatever time passed in 1968. The same arrival rules apply; they'll appear someplace secluded, outside of immediate danger, etc. (If they left anything in Atlantis, they may face the disheartening task of going back there *again* . . .)

Of course, if they relied on modern (or futuristic) high-tech gear to reach the sunken city the first time, they may have a difficult time returning in 1968.

Now, if this March of 1968 is the same for all users of the portal (in other words, if there aren't alternate timelines), then that return portal may become clogged very quickly. Consider that, although people can come from all times in the future, they must go to the same point to get home; as such there might start being lines forming in 1968's Atlantis portal . . .

Keep in mind that nothing says a party has to go home. They could easily live out the rest of their lives from 1968 onward. (Of course, then they'd need to endure the 70s again.)

What's Going On?

January 30	Tet Offensive in Vietnam
April 5	Martin Luther King Jr. assassinated
May	France brought to standstill by protesting workers and students
June 5	Bobby Kennedy assassinated
August 20	Soviets invade Czechoslovakia to end liberalization
August 26	Riots at Democratic National Convention in Chicago
October	Summer Olympics in Mexico City, Mexico

The in-game reason for this bizarre time portal is left to the GM's imagination. At its finest it doesn't *have* to be explained; many stories have had their heroes just appear in an interesting time. But if that's not satisfying, here are some possibilities.

1968 was, in all likelihood, meant to be a leap *forward* . . . at the time that Atlantis would have met its doom, 1968 would have been far in the future. Why this year? Perhaps the Atlanteans liked it; maybe the heroes stepped into the Atlantean Tourist Machine and arrived at the last programmed vacation destination. (The April 6th premiere of Kubrick's *2001* would be especially ironic . . .) Perhaps the Atlanteans had some tie to Yuri Gagarin, the Soviet astronaut and first man in space, and had some continuing dealings with him before his plane crash death on March 27th, 1968.

But in all likelihood there was some strong reason for the time portal. Various excuses metaphysical, astrological, and/or historical can be devised; 1968, for example, saw the beginning of the big surge in constructing nuclear power plants, and maybe the increased draw on fissionable material has caused this to be a nexus of some sort. Or this might be more sinister and/or intentional; depending on the motivations of the Atlanteans, perhaps they were manipulating (or ensuring) the future.

One of the most intriguing options is that the Atlanteans *escaped* to 1968. Perhaps whatever cataclysm doomed the Atlanteans (nuclear winter, invaders, alien microbes) was finally certain to be gone by that time; although they needed to desert their city, at least they would still be alive. And, owing to the peculiar temporal physics of the device, they could have planned to spend a few hundred years in their future, only to return home once those years had passed. (Although perhaps the city hadn't sunk until after they departed their time; in that case, they may well be stuck here if they can't figure out where their return portal is.)

If the Atlanteans *did* escape to 1968, then the ironic question arises: What happened to them all . . . again? After all, there (probably) isn't any evidence in the modern time of Atlanteans; are they just hiding very well, or did something happen to them? In this way an entire campaign could be based around this portal, and the search for the truth.

The success or failure of this entire adventure seed probably depends on maintaining a sense of wonder, possibility, and tragedy. Layering the incredible awe and scope of Atlantis with the emotional heights and depths that 1968 offered -- and the tragic stories of both -- can make for a more poignant adventure than a standard sunken city.

Side Salad

Once the heroes have returned home, and presuming Atlantis still stands, the existence of a time portal like this would have enormous implications. If any governments found out -- especially if more than one -- there is a strong possibility of warfare over this find.

Of course the heroes *could* just become rich in various ways, depending on the nature and rules of time travel. Even if the standard means of amassing wealth through time travel (stock market, collectibles) is unavailable, the party could still become rich escorting rich nostalgic Baby Boomers through the perilous undersea voyage to relive earlier days.

Although this idea assumes a modern or science fiction setting, nothing says other historical options can't be considered. Many cliffhangers heroes have sought Atlantis, for example, and seeing how the 1920s handles the 1960s could be very interesting . . .

Pyramid Reviews: Blink and My Word!

Published by [Out of the Box Games](#)

* * *

Pyramid Pick: Blink

Pyramid Pick: Blink

by Reinhard Staupe

56 cards each; \$8.95

When you first look at *Blink*, or just read the box blurbs, it's easy to see all the influences that could have gone into making this game: *Uno*, *Brawl*, *Crazy Eights*, *Twitch*, Lucky Charms breakfast cereal. When you open the box and see that it contains 56 cards, a slip of paper with rules and a company catalog, you'll probably think you got taken for nine bucks. When you read the rules, there's no denying they're almost childishly simple.



But when you're smacking cards down faster than you can draw them from your deck and sweating, thinking your opponent must be speeding ahead of you and you've got to pour it on or you'll fall behind in what the box calls "the world's fastest game," you concentrate less on little things like how lame you thought the game would be or grease fires in your kitchen.

The 56 cards are decorated with a variety of symbols in different colors. The deck is split during startup into two piles, one for each player, and this forms your draw pile. Each player takes three cards from their deck to form their hand, and each then puts another card face-down on the table. The face-down cards are flipped over simultaneously and the heart palpitations begin.

With never more than three cards in your hand, you must select one to play onto one of the two face-up cards between the players. These cards have to match in some way; they must show the same symbol (lightning bolt on lightning bolt), have the same count (three symbols on three symbols) or share the same color (red on red). There are no turns; you just spew cards onto the table as quickly as you can. The first person to exhaust his draw pile wins.

The game is intended for two players, though there are rules for more. The multiplayer rules almost read like a forced afterthought by the creator, but playing them doesn't take away from the game at all. Both are fast and frenetic, and while it does share a number of things in common with the games mentioned above, *Blink* is different enough to stand on its own. Quick, fun and cheap at the price.

* * *

Pyramid Review: My Word!

by Reiner Knizia

56 cards each; \$8.95

My Word! also has some kinship with a few other releases, most notably *AlphaBlitz*, *Word Whiz* and *Letterhead*, but the similarities are fairly superficial. Again you have

a deck of 56 cards, this time with letters or combinations thereof. Sensibly, there are plenty of As and Es and Ss, and only one of things like Z. Some cards have paired letters like RE and IT, and someone has wisely joined QU together on a single card.

Each player gets a turn as dealer; the dealer doesn't score points, but instead adjudicates when there's confusion about who spoke up first. Drawing cards off the top of the deck, the dealer plays them out onto the table at whatever speed and in whatever layout he cares to while the others search for words. Players must use the letters of at least three cards to create their word, and they must use the letters as they appear on the card - ND can be used to spell ENDS but not NEED.

When a player spots a word, he calls it out. If he's right, that player gets to scoop the cards that spell out his word into his hand and keep them. If he's wrong, everyone else at the table gets to take one card from those showing and hold on to it. This continues until all the cards have been played or no one can make any more words. Everyone gets a point for each card they took, the score is noted, and the cards are reshuffled and passed to the new dealer. When everyone has had a turn dealing, the scores for each round are added up and the highest total wins.

To keep things from getting too simple, there are Wild Cards -- ? and ?? -- that can be used to represent one or two letters (respectively) of your choosing to fill holes in potential words. When a player blows it and everyone else gets to take a card, canny folks will use that time to study the cards that will remain when they've made their selection, piecing together new patterns and setting themselves up for a kill. And while the relative vocabulary levels of the participants do seem to skew things in favor of the brains in the group, often enough there are queer deals (say, a bunch of vowels) that allow clever people to hunt for the big score while the less savvy ones are ready to pounce on simpler combinations.

Like its companion, *My Word!* is letter-perfect at the price.

-- *Andy Vetromile*

Fairy Meat

Published by [Kenzer & Company](#)

Designed by Scott Leaton



44 page rulebook including 12 pages of cardboard counters and figures; \$24.88

Although few will admit it, everyone has always suspected that those fairies were up to no good. That they are a bunch of violent cannibals, however, may shock even the most ardent fairy critic. The makers of *Knights of the Dinner Table* bring their sense of humor to the world of fairy-on-fairy battle in *Fairy Meat*, a fast-playing miniature war game. Designer Scott Leaton has created an entertaining game with easy movement rules, simple magic use, and a combat system that uses regular playing cards instead of dice.

The entire game is included in 44 pages of rules, 12 of which are cardboard counters and cardboard fairy figures. The rules are clear and well organized. The art has the lush flavor of typical fantasy art, but is mixed with the cannibalism theme, making for somewhat gruesome scenes.

The world of *Fairy Meat* is our own world, and the scale is 1:1. Thus, any playing surface will do, and any existing obstacles are appropriate as well. For example, a table with soda cans, snack food, and game books is a suitable field of combat. Players will have to cut out the circular counters (although a separate Components Pack contains die-cut counters) and will either assemble the cardboard fairy miniatures, or use the cardboard wings and weapons to make any other miniature into a fairy. (Kenzer and Company has released metal fairy miniatures as well.) A battle also requires a standard deck of playing cards with jokers.

Like any miniature war game, players have a number of army points with which they buy fairy units and weapons. Then, they choose a scenario that defines the goals of the battle. Typically, the scenario involves blood thirsty fairies attacking one another, then eating whatever is left. It may not be pretty, but it is kind of cute.

Each fairy starts the game with a number of Live points, a number of Kill points, and a number of Twinkle points. Live points define how well a fairy defends themselves in a fight, in other words, how well they live. Kill points define the power of an attack coming from that fairy. Twinkle points power fairy spells. Every time a fairy takes damage in a fight, they will lose Kill points and Live points. When all of a fairy's Kill and Live points are gone, they become fairy food. The primary way of regaining Live and Kill points is by eating a fairy that has died during the battle.

Fairy Meat features easily remembered movement rules that minimize measuring and speed up the violence. Fairies can Pose while not moving and gain a combat bonus, Flutter for 12 inches at an altitude of three inches, Frolic for six inches at a height of six inches, or Pounce, moving only three inches, but clearing obstacles that are 12 inches high. All movement ends with the fairy standing on the ground, so flight more closely resembles a jump.

Rather than dice, players use playing cards to fight one another. Fairies have three types of combat with which to rend one another into bite-sized pieces. During melee combat, the attacking fairy gets a number of cards equal to their Kill points and a defender gets a number of cards equal to their Live points. Each player chooses one card, and if the attacker's card is higher, then the defender is going to hurt. If the defender has the higher card, then the attack is squandered. Weapons will add to the number of cards that a fairy draws. Also, a player can add trump cards, jack

through ace, to increase their number card. This system sounds involved at first, but plays surprisingly fast.

Ranged combat is conducted similarly to melee, but at distances prescribed by the ranged weapon. Wrestling is similar to ranged and melee, but both players draw cards equal to their Kill points and either, or both, may take damage.

Fairies also have magic in their arsenal. They can spend their Twinkle points on eight different spells. Spells can restore Live and Kill points, damage enemies, and affect movement. The game leaves room for a much longer spell list which will probably grow with expansions.

Finally, fairies lose Kill, Live, and Twinkle points throughout combat, but can regain them as well. A fairy can stop fighting long enough to eat a fallen fairy. Her dinner can give her as many Kill or Live points as the meal had when living. Fairies can only charge up their Twinkle points by discarding trumps during combat or by giving up attacking for one round.

Fairy Meat is an excellent introduction to miniature wargaming. It is simple enough for new players to grasp in a single game, but retains enough variables and complexity to distinguish it from a board game. Grogards who are not amused enough by the theme and art may enjoy the speed of set-up and play along with the card mechanic. And who wouldn't be tickled to watch those cute, little sprites beat the pixie dust out of one another?

-- *Brad Weier*

Pyramid Review

The Tide of Years

Published by [Atlas Games](#)

Written by Michelle A. Brown Nephew



Illustrated by Ross Bonilla, Helena Wickberg, David Interdonato, Chris Seaman, and Scott Reeves

48 pages; \$10.95

It begins with the party camping down for a quiet night beside a lake. Then a strangely garbed man enters their campsite and implores them for their aid in restoring the city of Lagueen to its former glory. The only problem is that Lagueen, a fabled utopia made so through the will and belief of its citizens, happened to have disappeared and passed into legend aeons ago. Fortunately for the characters, the stranger, Jonar is a native of Lagueen and happens to know where it is: at the bottom of the lake they choose to camp beside.

This is the beginning of the fourth scenario for *d20* in Atlas Games' Penumbra line. Designed for characters of 4th through 6th levels, it is the first entry in the series to be written by its editor, Michelle A. Brown Nephew. Further, it marks a departure from the previous three adventures in several ways.

First is its appearance. Ochre hues are used throughout to enhance every aspect of *The Tide of Years*, including the text, sidebars and other art. The addition of a third shade improves the look of this book no end. David Interdonato's interior illustrations, already good, really stand out with the addition of these shades. Second, the scenario contributes substantially in terms of content to the Open Gaming License, more so than other Penumbra releases. This is not just new monsters, magical items and traps, which *The Tide of Years* has, but a whole new clerical domain, that of Time.

Initially I was dubious at the concept of time travel and manipulation being added to fantasy games, as it has the ability to thoroughly unbalance any campaign it is introduced to, much as psionics did in the first and second editions of *Dungeons & Dragons*. Thankfully, it is obvious that a great deal of thought and care has gone in designing this new domain. It is specifically pitched away from time travel and manipulation beyond already existing spells as powerful as Haste or Slow. The new spells do not go past eighth level and include Detect Temporal Disturbance, Scry the Ages, Hastening of Age, and Wellspring of Youth. The last two are interesting in that they alter the physical age of the spell's recipient without effecting the actual age of their soul and thus how long they will live. The secrets of time travel through divine means still remain the province of higher-level clerics and particularly the devout followers of Ras'Tan the All-Knower. This is the god of enlightenment, whose domains are Sun, Time, and Knowledge, and who is the patron god of the city of Lagueen.

(SPOILER ALERT!)

To restore Lagueen to its former glory, Jonar, who is a priest of Ras'Tan, directs the players to visit the main temple to Ras'Tan in the lake below. There they have to restore the Temporal Crystal to its rightful place, but this is not an easy task. They require a shard of the Temporal Crystal - which is located half way up a cliff overlooking the lake and they need to a method of breathing underwater. One is available in the form of a kiss from a capricious water sprite, so the players need to be on their most persuasive behaviour. This is alongside a number of combat encounters with

prehistoric monsters that do seem rather superfluous.

Once below, the Temple of Ras'Tan is easy to locate. It is a giant tetrahedron (like a four-sided die) that thrusts up from the mud. The temple is only partially flooded, so actually exploring the triangular rooms inside is actually just that little more difficult than doing so completely underwater would be. There are still plenty of opportunities for the players to explore this strange new environment both inside and out, and plenty of information is included to run this properly. The temple itself is nicely mapped using ProFantasy Software's *Campaign Cartographer 2*, and can be downloaded from the Atlas Games' web site.

Not only do the players have to contend with environmental problems, but understandably temporal ones also. These include temporal traps and a new monster in the form of a Temporal Elemental. The latter is the final obstacle in restoring the Temporal Crystal to its place; there the adventure ends. The aftermath though -- possible reward for the players (though there are plenty of scrolls and potions to find that might have survived submerged), the effect of restoring Lagueen and the effect this restoration might have on its neighbors -- is all covered in the last chapter, which gives lots of solid advice on each of these topics.

Because of its subject matter, *The Tide of Years* is more atmospheric than other Penumbra titles. It includes much that can be continued over into existing campaigns, but cleverly stills remains generic enough to be introduced to almost any game. Primarily this is the god Ras'Tan, whom the players can choose to worship or even follow if they wish to be come a cleric of his faith, after coming into contact with him in this adventure. Secondly, Lagueen and its clerics can become a factor in the party's future adventures, either as a patron or allies. Their ability to travel through time opens up plenty of opportunities for the DM to take his players to mysterious times and places.

(END SPOILER ALERT)

Hopefully Atlas Games will follow this adventure with both trips to other time periods and more information on the higher levels of the Domain of Time, as this is an excellent starting point for both. In adding more to the Open Gaming License and coming with a strong atmosphere of its own, *The Tide of Years* stands out as the best Penumbra title to date.

--Matthew Pook (With thanks to Roj at Wayland's Forge)

Islands in the Timestream: Alternate Atlantises

"Imagine an alternate history uncannily like our own, but with one great difference; Plato's Atlantis was real . . ."

-- Phil Masters, *GURPS Atlantis*

Or don't imagine it; game in it! Just because Plato sank Atlantis doesn't mean it's gone, after all -- rather the opposite, even in our humdrum world of plate tectonics and carbon-14 dating. The following four Atlantises (Atlantes? Atlanti?) can all work with the rough geographic strictures set down by Plato (and Phil Masters) -- a mountainous island slightly smaller than Algeria roughly where the Azores are right now. (It's at its easternmost location in the first setting; at its westernmost -- west of Bermuda -- in the second.) So tear up those tired old maps, and sail on!

"And, besides this, the inhabitants of the last island Poseidonis preserved the memory of the prodigious magnitude of the Atlantic island as related by their ancestors, and of its governing for many periods all the islands in the Atlantic sea. From this isle one may pass to other large islands beyond, which are not far from the firm land, near which is the true sea."

-- Proclus, *Commentary on the Timaeus*

It turns out Carthage was good for something after all. Its ships had kept the Atlanteans out of the Mediterranean, after they slowly recovered from the catastrophes following their Greek debacle. But when Rome smashed the Punic in 202 B.C., that opened the Pillars of Hercules to Atlantis again -- the mud had receded three centuries before that. For a century, they traded and watched; their galleys slowly became familiar sights even in Neapolis and Alexandria. They paid in gold and orichalcum for certain old statues of the gods, for bones dug up from Aegean islets, and even for cuttings from the sacred groves. They were biding their time -- and in 73 B.C., when Spartacus raised the banner of revolt in Italy, Atlantean galleys landed in rebellious Spain. With them came the bronze giant Talos, rebuilt in Atlantean forges; the deadly chimera, rehatched from a fossilized Typhonian egg; the sirens and tritons and harpies and gorgons by the battalion. By virtue of the Atlantean priesthood's blood, that of hereditary sons of Poseidon, they brought these fragments of heroic ages past to life. Of course, they *are* fighting Romans. Heroic David-Drake-school PC legionaries square off against magical monsters from Bacchic nightmare in this *GURPS Atlantis* vs. *GURPS Imperial Rome* showdown.

*"There will come an age
In the far-off years, when the Ocean
Shall unloose the bonds of things,
And a great land shall emerge, while Tethys
Will disclose new realms, and Thule
Shall no longer be the ultimate."*

-- Seneca, *Medea*, lines 375-79

On October 28, 1493, Columbus' ships passed through a storm like none any man aboard had ever seen -- lambent green St. Elmo's fire danced along the yardarms, and a line of swirling fog cut across the seas running due north to a harbor that would, in another future, become [Philadelphia's](#) Navy Yard. One sailor swore he saw an "enormous metal ship" as they crossed the fog line. But when Columbus' armada made landfall in Atlantis' Grand Harbor three days later, such visions were put aside. The glorious vistas of orichalcum and crystal towers, the powerful slab-sided Atlantean dromons that sailed against the wind as easily as with, and the tall, bronzed figures who greeted Columbus were all too real. When his ships returned to Spain with decks piled high with roc's feathers, gryphon eggs, mandrake peppers, orichalcum, dog-headed slaves, and ultraviolet dyes, the dangerous jungles and sandy islets of his first voyage were put aside as well. Although the passage across "St. Elmo's Line" was tricky to navigate and hard to weather, the rewards of Atlantean trade made it worth the dangers.

A century later, feisty sea dogs from Tortuga or the piratical Azores harry the galleons on the Atlantis run -- but only on the return. Spanish ships carry cloth, and paper, and silver, and gunpowder, and glass, and cattle, and other goods apparently much esteemed by the Atlanteans. Failing a Spanish galleon piled with Atlantean goods (gathered from Hy-Brasil, and Calyferne, and a hundred other islands on the other side of the Line), a Portuguese one stuffed with gold

from Mexico suffices -- Camoes' conquest of the Aztecs was forty years ago, but the land still produces bullion in plenty. Such conquistador theatrics have not succeeded against Atlantis -- a disastrous 1530 battle off Poseidonis Harbor taught the Europeans that they could barely hold their own against Atlantean ships supported from shore by sorcery and driven by vril. Enough Atlantean sorcery has found its way to European alchemists and vitruvians, however, to spark other nations' imagination. Drake's navy stopped Spanish galleons -- even the vril-driven ones -- in 1588, after all. Perhaps, brave navigators with John Dee's newest charts might be able to find an alternate passage through the Line, bypass Atlantean waters, and open up trade with other islands -- or an embassy with Prester John, who rules Utter India, somewhere furthest west.

*"Solemn heave the Atlantic waves between the gloomy nations,
Swelling, belching from its deeps red clouds & raging Fires!
Albion is sick. America faints! enrag'd the Zenith grew.
As human blood shooting its veins all round the orb'd heaven
Red rose the clouds from the Atlantic in vast wheels of blood
And in the red clouds rose a Wonder o'er the Atlantic sea . . ."*
-- William Blake, "America: a Prophecy," Plate 4, lines 2-7

Captain Cochrane could hardly blame the Sea Lords for thinking him mad. But he ran a tight ship, and his crew backed his testimony -- the French West Indies fleet had escaped when an armored leviathan, belching smoke from its chimneys, had sailed over the horizon and splintered three of his ships with broadsides so accurate that they must have been laid by clockwork! Further reports from the Straits of Gibraltar, the American coasts, and Halifax all painted more of the picture -- somehow, Atlantis had returned to 1805, and to the middle of the Atlantic Ocean, and begun making war on Britain! Natural philosophers decided there must have been some sort of "time slip" from an alternate Creation; Atlanteans in Europe soon confirmed that in their history, Atlantis had not sunk (save into barbarism) after their defeat by the ancient Greeks. Roman conquest, Irish settlement, Arab invasion, Portuguese reconquista, Elizabethan alliance, Huguenot migration: all of these enriched Atlantis. Trade struggles and bitter rivalries with England, Spain, and France (at various times) forced Atlantis (and its competitors) to improve on primitive Heronian screws, Archytan clockwork, and Archimedean engines until the naval race led, again, to war.

Napoleon has retained the services of the American steam-expert Fulton, and has sent Talleyrand to negotiate a Franco-Atlantean Alliance with the Platonian Republic. The Americans enjoy a fortuitous opportunity to study a hurricane-wrecked Atlantean leviathan on Cape Hatteras and spark their Yankee ingenuity -- Britain, with the world's greatest sailing navy, finds itself falling behind in the Age of Fighting Steam. PCs in this *GURPS Steampunk-Scarlet Pimpernel* game can be industrial spies infiltrating Atlantean shipyards (or Atlantean libraries), mesmerists attempting to harness the energies of the time-slip, gadgeteers in Boston or Southampton or Brest seeking to build submersibles, or ornithopters, or hydrofoils -- or jut-jawed Atlantean mariners seeking new worlds to conquer with the power of steam!

"The Fuehrer is engaged in the question of occupation of the Atlantic Islands in the view of a future war against America."

-- letter of Luftwaffe Major Sigismund Freiherr von Falkenstein, to Luftwaffe operations staff, October 1940

When Atlantis rose again, it was a bad time. Specifically, it was 1930, and the world couldn't afford the resources to properly explore the new continent. The hurricanes, droughts, floods, and blizzards caused by the new mid-Atlantic weather patterns only exacerbated the problems of the Depression; National Geographic, the Royal Geographic Society, and the Berlin Academy of Sciences could only mount one or two expeditions apiece into the jungle interior. Some of them came back, reporting a Darwinian nightmare of dinosaur hatcheries, angry (and deadly) gill-men living in weed-grown Greek temples, and enormous forests of crinoids and anemones the size of oaks. All under a volcanic pall that raised the temperature to tropical levels, feeding the riotous growth of plants and monsters from a prehistoric past. However, by 1943, the Seabees have cleared off nastier jungles than this one in the Pacific -- or so the War Department thinks. It's not like they have a choice; the Germans have fortified the ruins of the Grand Harbor (now a Kriegsmarine naval base) with enormous radar-controlled guns; if the U.S. is going to stop the Nazis from expanding their Atlantean bridgehead, it will have to begin with jungle fighting. And it had better begin soon -- the OSS thinks the Nazis are finding some kind of weird artifacts deep in the interior that just might win the war for Hitler.

This ***GURPS Cliffhangers-Special Ops-Dinosaurs*** campaign frame is World War II action with everything but the kitchen sink. From orichalcum pyramids to the mighty Kong to nightmarish Nazi experimental facilities, anything and everything can lurk back there in the Atlantean jungle. You can even advance the timeline to 1953, and game a ***GURPS Atomic Horror-Special Ops*** game of Army Rangers hunting down Communist guerrillas among the gill-men while keeping an eye out for giant tyrannosaurs made radioactive when the Dresden fallout blew west

The Not-About-Atlantis Column

Do you know what I love about Atlantis?

At its core, Atlantis can be *anything*.

I don't confess to being a connoisseur of all knowledge, but off the top of my head I can remember Atlantis being:

- A super-scientific world explored by Indiana Jones in a pulp setting.
- A steampunk-esque city explored by TV's Macgyver in a modern setting.
- A steampunk world explored by 1890's Verne-esque explorers.
- A source of magic from untold ages past, as told in DC Comics.
- A domed kingdom with water-breathing humanoids ruled by Namor, a mutant with wings on his feet.
- A domed sci-fi kingdom of the year 2099 with water-breathing fish men who wore breathing suits filled with water. . . and some of whom wore *glasses!* (As seen in the deliriously awful *Ravage 2099* comic.)
- An ever-changing construct of dreams, built on the collective unconscious of this mythical lost land that *must* have existed.
- Zorak from *Space Ghost Coast to Coast* (No, wait . . . that's a mantis.)

Anyway, the point is, whatever you could possibly want to do with Atlantis, it will work.

Moody atmospheric exploration? No problem. Action-packed pulp showdown? Simple. Four-color domed cities rising from the seas to invade the surface world? You bet! Interdimensional prison holding a pre-historic proto-demon? Sure! (That last one was taken from my own personal use of Atlantis, as part of a *Fading Suns* adventure. I posited the Atlanteans -- or, more likely, the ancient precursor Ur race -- sank the city to keep this fiend from escaping. Unfortunately, the Bureau of Back Story failed to inform the players of this . . .)

Now, so much of Atlantis' appeal and utility comes from its symbolic and thematic utility. Which is why this column isn't really about Atlantis, per se. Rather, this column is about the notion that you *can* do whatever you want with many ideas, even classic ones.

As an example, I ran a *GURPS Prisoner* game for a while. I wanted to do thematically similar things with the TV show -- with surrealism and psychological issues -- only with more pulp action . . . sort of a cross between *Secret Agent Man* and *Prisoner*. (Fans of both shows: file under "I" for irony.)

So when both players' characters were pursued by strangely-clad men in jetpacks through the streets of New York . . . *before* entering The Village . . . they were revved for action. And they escaped.

When I incarcerated them in The Village, the first question I asked each of them was, "Have you ever seen *The Prisoner* TV show?" When they answered yes, and that's why they were interested in playing the RPG, I said, "No no no . . . has your *character* ever seen the TV show?" Long pause. When they stammered something in the affirmative, I shouted out, "It's **just** like that." That supplied the surrealism.

And finally, when they were testing the limits of The Village, and made those first tentative steps to escape, I let them. For an hour of real-world time they walked outside the city limits . . . and no one tried to stop them. Eventually they reached a small English village; from there they could call their family, friends, or anything else they wanted. They were, for all intents and purposes, seemingly free. But the players *and* characters had both seen the show, and knew how unlikely that was. This tension supplied the psychological issues.

Then they were kidnapped by the strangely-clad jetpack men and transported to the *real* Village.

And then they were scared.

So the point of this rambling little column is to consider the possibilities of taking the most common of elements, themes, and stories of roleplaying, and don't be afraid to make them your own. *Spelljammer*, a personal favorite of mine (sorry, folks), combines space opera with medieval fantasy. *All Flesh Must Be Eaten* took the "pursued by zombies" yarn and made it entirely fresh by transporting it to different times and places. The *X-Files* took the standard mystery show and turned it on its ear by *not* solving most of its fundamental stories. And so on.

The oldest ideas -- even hoary old chestnuts like, say, a sunken continent -- can be made anew with a clever twist or turn. If you're designing a dungeon crawl, consider constructing one where the heroes must fight their way *out* of the dungeon from the bottom up. Or a dungeon where they specifically *can't* kill their opposition. (Perhaps the party is cursed such that all damage they deliver is dealt back onto them.) If you're designing a murder mystery, have all other information be known except *when* the murder happened -- and have that be the piece of information that needs to be figured out. Can you design a horror adventure if you suddenly make the heroes invulnerable to all damage?

Even the most classic elements of roleplaying games can be reinvented to maintain that air of uncertainty, wonder, and awe . . . not unlike a certain lost continent.

A lost continent, I might add, that this column is *not* about.

* * *

For those of you who haven't noticed, *Pyramid* is proud welcome Guardians of Order (*Big Eyes, Small Mouth*) to our playtesting fold. For the next week or two, they'll be playtesting *Hong Kong Action Theatre 2nd Edition* with us. Make them feel welcome and go check it out!

Our main playtest file page is at <http://www.sjgames.com/pyramid/login/playtest/>

The *Hong Kong Action Theatre* playtest files are at <http://www.sjgames.com/pyramid/login/playtest/hkat/>

* * *

This week also sees the conclusion of the Cliffhangers Round Robin *Around the World in 80 Thrills* adventure. Please feel free to make your comments, thoughts, and opinions known on our [discussion groups](#) or by sending us an [e-mail](#).

(Oh, and for those of you who are curious, the adventure was written months ago; we didn't tie it in to Atlantis for this week's theme. But it seemed like a happy coincidence to tie a theme around, so that's what we did.)

--*Steven Marsh*

* * *

*Last week's answer: **Brave New World**, p. 28.*

(One star) "The Narrator rolls three dice (results of 4, 6 and 9) and consults the Technobabble chart: It appears that the gauss induction grid has shorted out."

Dork Tower!



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by Steve Honeywell

The *Player's Handbook* for *Dungeons & Dragons 3rd Edition* contains many interesting and unusual weapons your characters can take into battle. However, for it to offer a complete list of weapons that have been used down through history would cause the book to be as thick as the average phone book. The following list of weapons includes some ideas for weapons and weapon-like items not covered in the original rules.

Many of the weapons included here offer special rules or abilities. Care has been made to both make these weapons historically accurate and playable. For instance, sais were designed both as an offensive weapon and as a device to disarm opponents or destroy their weapons. Suggested rules that allow sais to be used in this manner are included in the description of that weapon.

If any of these weapons seem too difficult to use or too complicated to keep track of, ignore them. Consult with your DM before you equip your characters with a weapon he or she may not allow in the campaign.

Atlatl

Not a weapon in and of itself, the atlatl (pronounced AT-lat'l) augments the use of javelins and other hurled weapons, increasing both the speed at which the weapon is thrown as well as the distance it can be thrown. The atlatl, for all intents and purposes, is a grooved stick. The javelin is placed into the groove and hurled overhand. This requires about three feet more clearance above the thrower than a normal javelin throw, making this device very difficult to use underground in anything but large caves.

The benefit to using an atlatl is in the range possible. The range increment for a javelin thrown with an atlatl is double that of a javelin thrown without an atlatl, so targets within 60 feet can be attacked without penalty.

Bagh Nakh/Shuko/Ashiko

Various forms of this weapon have existed around the world. Not originally a weapon, the Japanese shuko was developed to help a person climb walls. This device consists of a small glove that covers just the palm and back of the hand. Three to five spikes extend from the palm. Any character wearing shuko gets a +1 circumstance bonus for all climbing attempts provided the material being climbed allows the claws to penetrate (soft mortar, wood, etc.). If the material being climbed does not allow the claws to penetrate (metal, stone, etc.), the reverse is true--the claws reduce the character's ability to grip and give a -1 penalty to climbing attempts.

In battle, shuko can be used to strike much in the same manner as an unarmed attack. However, the claws do actual, not subdual, damage.

Also available are ashiko, which are a version of shuko worn on the feet. A character equipped with both shuko and ashiko get a +2 circumstance bonus for all climbing attempts, again provided that the material being climbed allows

the claws to penetrate. There is no additional penalty for wearing ashito when climbing a harder surface.

Similar in many ways to shuko, bagh nakh were designed not for climbing, but to simulate the attack of a wild animal. However, for game purposes, bagh nakh should be considered as shuko in terms of the circumstance bonus/penalty for climbing and in the method they are used in combat.

Battle Fan

This unique weapon may look ineffective and weak, but in the hands of a master, it is truly deadly. Made of ribs of iron or bone connected by strips of decorated canvas or fabric, the battle fan can be folded or unfolded. When folded, an attack with this weapon is treated as a short club. Unfolded, the fan can be used to slash. The amount of damage caused by this weapon is identical in either case.

What makes this weapon truly unique is that it can also be used to distract enemies in the middle of battle. This weapon can be used in battle as a primary or secondary weapon, with all penalties applying when it is used in the off hand. If the character forgoes his or her attack with a battle fan used in the off hand, he or she can add +5 circumstance bonus to any bluff attempt in battle due to the hypnotic movements of the fan. However, all penalties apply to any attack made with the primary weapon as if a second weapon is being used because of the concentration needed to manipulate the fan in combat.

Bokken

The bokken is essentially a wooden sword usually used for training. When used in combat, it is nothing more than a sword-shaped club. However, because it is shaped and balanced like a sword, characters not proficient in sword use will not be proficient in using a bokken. A bokken can be used to inflict subdual damage with no penalty.

A bokken can be made in the shape of any type of sword. It weighs the same as a normal sword of that type.

Chakram

This is Sikh weapon that looks like a bladed Frisbee with a hole in the center. Also called a quoit, the chakram is thrown by spinning it around the index finger. To release the chakram, the index finger is tucked down. It is difficult to release properly if the user hasn't been trained (an inexperienced user is just as likely to release the chakram in the direction of an ally), making this a particularly dangerous weapon in the hands of a novice.

Emi

Emi are tiny spears designed as jewelry. They extend about 10 inches and are usually worn as a ring. They allow the wearer to strike for actual damage in a hand-to-hand situation instead of attacking for subdual damage. Emi are easily poisoned and easily concealed, making them a favorite among assassins and characters requiring stealth. Emi are similar to daggers in most respects, but cannot be thrown.

Escrima/Kali Sticks

Escrima, or Kali sticks, are virtually always used as a set of two, one stick in each hand. They are little more than simple sticks of about two feet in length that can be used to strike. Escrima are generally much smaller and thinner than clubs. However, because of the speed and accuracy with which escrima can be handled, they can be used to strike at gaps in armor, pressure points, and joints. They are just as effective as a club in the hands of an expert.

If a character using escrima chooses, he or she can elect to take a second attack (one with each hand) in a given round. This entails all normal penalties for attacking with two weapons, with the off-hand weapon considered light.

Jo Staff

Essentially, the jo staff is a shortened version of the quarterstaff. Generally, a jo is between 4 and 4 1/2 feet long and is usually thicker than a quarterstaff. What it gives up in length, it makes up for in speed. In all other respects, it is the same as a quarterstaff.

Kusari Gama

The kusari gama is a hook or scythe attached to a long chain, usually with a weight on the far end. Traditionally, the weight and chain were used to snare an opponent, who could then be finished off at leisure with the hook. A variation of this weapon, the manriki gusari, has weights on both ends. One end is used to entangle and the other to bludgeon.

A successful hit with a kusari gama does no damage, but entangles and trips an opponent. In the next round, while the opponent struggles to free himself (using the Escape Artist skill with a DC of 20), the wielder of the kusari gama gets to attack as if his opponent is helpless. Naturally, this is only useful against enemies that can conceivably be tripped, and is useless against anything of large size or larger.

Sai

Sais look very much like swords with large hilts or the heads of tridents with a much larger central spike. The "blade" of a sai is generally octagonal or rounded, and while pointed on the end, has no sharpened edge. This is primarily a thrusting weapon.

The extended hilts on either side of the central blade of the sai are used to trap weapons and potentially break them. Any disarm attempt made with a sai is made without incurring the normal penalty of an attack of opportunity from the defender. Sais can also be used to strike at an enemy's weapon, with no penalty for their small size (they can be used to strike at even large weapons).

As with escrima, sais are almost always used in pairs. A character using sais may choose to take a second attack (one with each hand) in a given round. This entails all normal penalties for attacking with two weapons, with the off-hand weapon considered light.

Sectioned Chain/Whip

Also called a kau sin ke, this is a weapon of Chinese origin. It consists of a handle connected to a series of long, thin metal segments, usually with a much larger and thicker segment on the end. The segments are generally held together with chains or cord. Typically, a sectioned whip or chain has seven or nine segments, but some have as many as thirteen.

Unlike a whip, this weapon deals actual damage similar to a flail, and does not suffer the penalty against armor that a normal whip does. Unlike a flail, it is flexible throughout its length and has a much longer reach. Like a whip, it is treated as a projectile weapon with a maximum range of 15 feet and no range penalties. However, it cannot be used to trip or entangle.

Shinai

A shinai is similar to a bokken in that both are used for training purposes and are not generally seen in actual combat. However, unlike bokken, shinais are always straight and cylindrical. A shinai is made from bamboo slats, tied tightly into a cylinder and wrapped with twine. The end is usually padded, as is the hilt. Many a martial arts student has felt the sting of his instructor's shinai against his shins or calves when not performing up to his potential in training.

Shinai deal subdual damage only. Additionally, in the hands of someone untrained in their use, shinai are very fragile. If the twine that holds the shinai together breaks, the entire weapon unfolds and becomes useless. Any strike

with a shinai in the hands of a novice forces the shinai to save against DC 10. A missed save causes the shinai to break and unfold.

Three-Section Staff

This is a truly unique weapon that combines the best elements of the quarterstaff, nunchaku, and escrima all in one difficult-to-use (but highly effective) package. It consists of three hardwood sections about the same length as a single escrima and about the same thickness as a quarterstaff. The middle section of the staff is traditionally connected to the other two by chain or stout cord.

This weapon has many different uses. All three sections could be folded over and the weapon used as a club; two sections could be folded with the third acting as a flail; the user could hold the middle section and use both end sections as flails; or the wielder could hold the two end sections and use the central piece to block and strike.

Because of the unique form of this weapon, any character using a three-section staff can elect to make a second attack in a given round. This entails all normal penalties for attacking with two weapons, with the off-hand weapon considered light.

Tigerhead Hooks

A fascinating and frightening-looking weapon, a tigerhead hook is designed both to kill and to intimidate. It consists of a long, hooked shaft with a sharp point both on the hook and the opposite end. It is gripped near the base, and the hand guard consists of a crescent-shaped blade that can also be used for striking. Tigerhead hooks are almost always used in a set of two.

Like many of the weapons listed here, a character using tigerhead hooks can elect to make a second attack in a given round, one attack with each weapon. This entails all normal penalties for attacking with two weapons, with the off-hand weapon considered light.

Tonfa

Tonfa are a medieval Asian weapon that is most-commonly seen today in the form of police batons. This weapon consists of a stick approximately two feet long with a short handle on one side. Tonfa are almost always used in pairs. Traditionally, they are used by holding the handle with the long part of the weapon extending down the forearm. The shorter end extends forward and can be used to strike. The weapon can also be rotated in the hand, with the larger end swinging like a club, or extended forward to jab.

This is an extremely versatile weapon, and can be used to block attacks, strike, trip, and subdue opponents. As with bokken, a character using tonfa can elect to cause subdual damage with no penalty.

Like many of the weapons listed here, a character using tonfa can elect to make a second attack in a given round, one attack with each tonfa. This entails all normal penalties for attacking with two weapons, with the off-hand weapon considered light.

Finally, because tonfa are designed to be as much of a defensive weapon as an offensive one, a player wielding a pair of tonfa can elect to use the off-hand tonfa as a shield. It offers the same protection as a buckler, and can be used against the melee weapon attacks of a single opponent. So, while a character with tonfa can defend against every axe blow from an attacking barbarian, the tonfa is useless in blocking the claws of a wild animal, bite attacks, or missiles.

Proficiencies

Characters are given proficiencies in these weapons automatically as follows:

Barbarian	bokken, emi, jo staff, shinai
Bard	emi, jo staff
Cleric	emi, jo staff
Druid	jo staff
Fighter	bokken, emi, jo staff, shinai
Monk	chakram, emi, escrima, jo staff, tonfa*
Paladin	bokken, emi, jo staff, shinai
Ranger	bokken, emi, jo staff, shinai
Rogue	bokken (short sword only), emi, shuko/ashito
Sorcerer	emi, jo staff
Wizard	emi, jo staff

* Because training differs for Monk characters depending on the monastery they learned at, the DM may also wish to allow a Monk character to choose to be proficient in one or more of the following weapons: battle fan, kusari gama, sai, shinai, three-section staff, and tigerhead hooks.

Additionally, some DMs may wish to allow Barbarian characters to be proficient in atlatl use.

Weapon	Style	Cost*	Size	Dam.	Crit.	Range Inc.	Weight*	Type
Atlatl	Exotic, Ranged	1GP	Med.	1D6	x2	60 ft.	1lb.	piercing
Ashito	Exotic, Melee	5GP	Tiny	1D3	x2	--	1lb.	slashing
Bagh Nakh/Shuko	Exotic, Melee	5GP	Tiny	1D3	x2	--	1lb.	slashing
Battle Fan	Exotic, Melee	15GP	Small	1D3	x2	--	1lb.	bludgeoning/slashing
Bokken	Martial, Melee	5GP	S-L	1D4**	x2	--	3lb.-30lb.	bludgeoning
Chakram	Exotic, Ranged	1GP	Tiny	1D2	x3	10 ft.	1/5lb.	slashing
Emi	Simple, Melee	2GP	Tiny	1D2	x2	--	1/2lb.	piercing
Escrima/Kali Stick	Exotic, Melee	--	Small	1D6	x2	--	1lb.	bludgeoning
Jo Staff	Simple, Melee	--	Med.	1D6	x2	--	4lb.	bludgeoning
Kusari Gama	Exotic, Melee	10GP	Med.	--/1D6	x2	5 ft. (max.)	6lb.	piercing
Sai***	Exotic, Melee	4GP	Small	1D6	x2	--	3lb.	piercing
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Shinai	Martial, Melee	2GP	Med.	1D3****	x2	--	2lb.	bludgeoning
Three-Section Staff	Exotic, Melee	5GP	Large	1D6	x2	--	5lb.	bludgeoning
Tigerhead Hook	Exotic, Melee	10GP	Med.	1D6	x3	--	3lb.	piercing
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* Costs and weights are given for a single weapon, even for those normally used in pairs.

** Damage with a bokken or tonfa is either actual or subdual at the player's preference.

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**** Subdual damage

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Unlike a whip, this weapon deals actual damage similar to a flail, and does not suffer the penalty against armor that a normal whip does. Unlike a flail, it is flexible throughout its length and has a much longer reach. Like a whip, it is treated as a projectile weapon with a maximum range of 15 feet and no range penalties. However, it cannot be used to trip or entangle.

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This is an extremely versatile weapon, and can be used to block attacks, strike, trip, and subdue opponents. As with bokken, a character using tonfa can elect to cause subdual damage with no penalty.

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Druid	jo staff
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Paladin	bokken, emi, jo staff, shinai
Ranger	bokken, emi, jo staff, shinai
Rogue	bokken (short sword only), emi, shuko/ashito
Sorcerer	emi, jo staff
Wizard	emi, jo staff

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Emi	Simple, Melee	2GP	Tiny	1D2	x2	--	1/2lb.	piercing
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Jo Staff	Simple, Melee	--	Med.	1D6	x2	--	4lb.	bludgeoning
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by **Matt Riggsby**

The article "Low-Tech Economies" (available in *Pyramid* #26, *GURPS Best of Pyramid 1*, and [on-line](#)) outlined major differences between the modern economy and most ancient economies and provided basic rules for handling buying, shipping, and selling goods. This article presents some additional rules and historical material outlining other challenges in being a merchant in a low-tech setting, particularly the problems faced by adventurous "international" merchants. While "Low-Tech Economies" was fairly generic in describing situations in most more-or-less monetary early economies, this article draws heavily from the economies of Medieval Europe and the Near East. However, similar complications and strategies for responding to them could evolve in many low-tech societies.

Making Connections

Making deals and buying or selling goods depends heavily on getting to the right people. General knowledge and skill go only so far in the insular communities which characterize most low-tech societies. Moreover, somebody with recent knowledge and experience in the local market is much better prepared to work in it. Without a guide through a strange land, it will be difficult to make the necessary connections, and even a shrewd old hand may not have the specific knowledge to be on an even footing with a native.

Historically, the limitations of being a stranger in a foreign market led to a number of different reactions. For example, fairly early in the Medieval period, many successful merchants in Europe and the Near East were Jewish. Because Jews were a minority wherever they lived, they often maintained communication with other Jewish communities, giving them ready-made contacts in far-away cities. During the Renaissance, when trade across Europe reached a high enough volume, merchant and banking houses were able to employ permanent factors, agents charged with keeping an eye on local market conditions (which most emphatically included possible political changes; a merchant factor could closely resemble a spy) and passing important information along to the home office. Factors could act as a foreign merchant's guide to society, or even handle the buying and selling themselves. Being a factor could be lucrative and extremely educational, but it also kept one away from the center of a mercantile concern's power. A member of a merchant house could find himself appointed a factor as grooming for a higher position or as a polite form of exile. A factor or someone willing to act as one (a distant relative, co-religionist, family friend, etc.) is as much as social connection as an employee, so getting one can be an adventure in itself. A Patron or Contact advantage can provide characters with the appropriate assistance.

In game terms, a merchant visiting an area to which he is not native or at least a long-term resident is at a penalty to Merchant skill depending on how "distant" (in a cultural and political as well as geographical sense) it is from his home.

Familiarity	Penalty
Home city and dependent territories	NA
Same country/cultural area but different government or rulers (Renaissance Venetian in Rome, Classical Athenian in Sparta)	-2
Different country with some cultural or political ties (Medieval	-3

Englishman in Rome)

Different country with vague awareness of foreigner's society (Medieval Englishman in Istanbul) -5

Completely alien country (Medieval Englishman in Japan) -6

However, both experience and local aid can overcome this problem. A character may roll against an appropriate Area Knowledge specialty, although the GM may rule that other skills such as Streetwise or Savoir-Faire may apply in some cases. If the roll succeeds, the penalty is reduced by the amount by which the roll was made. The success of the roll will only offset the penalty; it will not provide a positive bonus. Alternatively, a character may employ a local or long-term resident (someone living and working in the foreign area for at least a year) with an applicable skill at 12+. With a qualified guide, the familiarity penalty is halved (round up), and the guide may roll against his own applicable skill in order to reduce the penalty further.

For example, Paolo, a merchant from a wealthy city-state in the warm, sunny south, has traveled to the far north to trade casks of wine for the exotic furs the northmen bring in from the snowy mountains of the interior. The northern barbarians speak a different language, worship different gods, and have, in general, a completely separate culture and history from Paolo's fellow city-dwellers. However, people from his country do, from time to time, come to the north to trade for furs and timber, so the northerners have some awareness of those short, dark-haired fellows from far away. Paolo is at -5 to his Merchant skill. Fortunately, on the trip up, he engaged the aid of an elderly northman who retired from a life of raiding to become a merchant sailor along the fjords of the north. Having the assistance of this man (a native with an Area Knowledge of 14) reduces Paolo's penalty to -3. The assistant rolls a 10 against his Area Knowledge, succeeding by 4 and wiping out the remaining penalty.

Barter, Cash, and Scarcity

To bypass the limitations of the scarcity of currency, merchants in low-tech settings may want or need to trade goods directly for other goods instead of selling them for cash. In this case, each merchant should make all appropriate rolls for selling his goods, and when the final values are determined the merchants can exchange equivalent values of goods. To continue the example, the GM has already determined the approximate local value of Paolo's wine (500 gallons of it) at \$15.30 per gallon. He decides that the trader Paolo is selling his wine to has a supply of good-quality hides at \$80 per square yard. First, the merchant and Paolo roll a contest of Merchant skills to determine the final value of the wine; they tie and the cost of \$15.30 per gallon stands. Then they roll a contest of Merchant skill to determine the final cost of the furs. The trader wins by one, bringing the cost of his hides up to \$81.60 per square yard, or about 5 1/3 gallons of wine per square yard of fur. Paolo would theoretically be able to trade his 500 gallons of wine (worth \$7650) for 93.75 square yards of furs.

Whether the merchant is trading for goods or cash, there is still a very real problem of supply. There simply may not be enough buyers on the market to take what he's selling off his hands immediately. When a merchant tries to buy or sell a large quantity of goods, roll against his Merchant skill. He may immediately exchange 30+(the amount the roll was made or missed by)*5% of his goods. Treat any result of less than 5% as 5%. The roll is modified as follows:

In particularly rich economy (high imperial Rome, Renaissance Venice): +4

In particularly poor economy (late imperial Rome, Dark Ages Europe): -4

Selling for cash rather than bartering: -3
(*this penalty may be increased for lightly monetized economies, like early Mesopotamia, or decreased for heavily monetized economies, like early modern Europe*)

Total price of goods to be sold is \$1000 or less: +8

(the GM may instead use the campaign's standard starting wealth and modify the following amounts accordingly; the GM may also treat small transactions as automatic total success)

Total price is \$1001-\$3000: +4

Total price is \$3001-\$5000: +2

Total price is \$5001-\$10,000: +0

Total price is \$10,001-\$20,000: -1

Total price is \$20,001-\$40,000: -2

Total price is \$40,001-\$60,000: -3

Total price is above \$60,000: -4, and an additional -1 for every \$20,000 or part thereof of the base cost

Seller accepts lower sale price: +1 per -2% to final sale price (the seller may choose to accept a lower price after the Merchant skill roll is made, applying the modifier retroactively)

The GM may impose other modifiers and arbitrary limitations as necessary. For example, no matter how good a merchant is or how highly desired his goods are, he is unlikely to get more than perhaps \$100 in cash if he attempts to sell his goods in a small farming village. After an initial attempt to sell goods, the merchant may roll again in a week to see how much he can sell then. By this time, market conditions may be different, the local price may have changed, and the merchant will have to negotiate a new price.

So, back to the example: Paolo is trying to sell \$7650 worth of wine. The important question is whether there are \$7650 worth of furs available to Paolo. The GM rules that the local economy is mildly prosperous (+1), and there's no modifier for quantity of goods he is trying to sell, and since he's bartering rather than selling for cash, there's no modifier there. The trading post is itself no bigger than a large village, but the GM decides that because the settlement's purpose is as a central point for trade, he won't impose a limit on the value Paolo can trade for, although he might if Paolo was trying to trade more. Paolo makes his Merchant roll by three, allowing him to sell 45% of his wine. At this rate, it will take Paolo about three weeks to completely exchange his wine for furs. Historically, caravans and shipping convoys could spend weeks or even months at their destinations, so Paolo is probably fairly happy with how things are going.

The GM may apply this rule to any large sales. For example, a feudal lord may want to sell off farmland with a huge nominal value, but if he wants to sell it quickly, he may have to accept a far lower price, or an enchanter may have to wait some time before he can find a buyer for a hideously expensive magical weapon.

Nothing Lasts Forever

A merchant dissatisfied with the prices he is offered may hold on to goods until the market changes, but he waits at his own risk. Goods can spoil, be nibbled by rodents, accidentally break, and be subject to pilfering or, in extreme cases, lost to raiders or warfare. In some settings, they may also run the risk of becoming obsolete or unfashionable. Large stocks of goods will diminish over time as detailed below, with the listed proportion of the original amount being lost

at the end of the time period given. The bonus amounts for extended lengths of time are cumulative. For example, a load of fresh carrots would be reduced by 8% a week for two weeks (total waste 16%), 13% the third week (total waste 29%), 18% the fourth week (total waste 47%), and so on. The GM may alter these rates for particularly fragile or durable commodities within each class (for example, lettuce will go bad much faster than onions). The amount of material wasted can also be modified by climate and other storage conditions. For goods with variable rates of decay, no waste at all is possible. Therefore, treat any result of zero or less as zero. The GM should use this chart only to reflect the gradual diminishing of large reserves sitting in a warehouse or ship's hold. It should *not* be used to slowly degrade individual pieces of adventurers' equipment or small quantities of supplies on hand, which receive far better care than goods in a warehouse.

Foods

Fairly durable fruits/vegetables (onions, potatoes):	8%/week for 2 weeks, +5% per week thereafter
Dried or preserved fruits/vegetables:	1%/month for 6 months, +0.5% per month thereafter
Fresh meat, most dairy products, delicate greens and vegetables:	+10%/day after 1 day
Dried, smoked, or preserved meat, hard cheeses:	1.5%/month for 6 months, +0.5% per month thereafter
Grain/flour:	1%/month for 6 months, +.5%/month thereafter

Other Goods

Cloth:	(1d-3)%/month
Fragile goods (ceramics, glass):	(1d-4)%/month
Durable goods (metal, stone):	(1d-5)%/month

Conditional Modifiers

Perishables in cold climate (near-freezing or below):	reduce waste by (1d-2)%
Dried perishables in very dry climate (near-desert or drier):	reduce waste by (1d-2)%
Perishables in wet climate:	+(1d-2)%
Perishables in climate-controlled containment (probably magical at these TLs, but includes burial under permafrost):	reduce waste by (1d)%

use instead of the above modifiers):

Transporting less durable goods (foods, cloth, fragile goods):	+(1d-3)%/week
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Transporting more durable goods (metal, stone):	+(1d-5)%/week
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The GM may apply any additional penalties he sees fit if the goods are in a vehicle which takes a "cargo" hit.

Example: On a later voyage, Paolo buys a cargo of 1000 square yards of silk. His voyage takes two months. The basic rate for damage to cloth is (1d-3)% per month. The GM rolls a 4 for the first month and a 2 for the second. 1% is lost the first month, 0% the second. Cloth is also damaged at (1d-3)% per week when transported. The GM rolls the following: 4, 4, 6, 1, 3, 5, 2, 1, for a loss of 7%. The total loss is 8%. Paolo's cargo of salable silk is 920 square yards when it reaches port.

Loans and Banking

As has already been mentioned, money is scarce. For a merchant, that's a problem. A merchant may have clear sailing, a silver tongue, and a room always waiting for him at the royal palace at his destination, but that doesn't do him any good if he can't buy a cargo to take with him and hire a ship to carry it. Few individuals, even few families, had the resources to lay out that kind of cash all at once. Even fewer could afford to lose a large sack of coin to accident or theft, and just as is the case today, legal money in one place is just a handful of metal (albeit valuable metal) in another. So where can a merchant get a great deal of money in a hurry? This is where banking comes in.

The earliest "bankers" were money lenders and coin changers. The two practices shaded into one another, and a banker would probably do some of both. Money lenders typically charged high rates of interest, usually expressed as a lump sum to be repaid after a set period of time rather than a percentage rate, with additional penalties for late payment ("In return for the loan of 100 pounds, there shall be a payment of 124 pounds ere next Witunside eve. Should the full amount not be paid, he shall suffer a penalty of four shillings each fortnight until the full sum be paid."). Translated into modern terms, annual interest rates of twenty percent or more were very common, but preferred customers could get slightly lower rates.

Coin changers changed money from one denomination or currency into another. The Saturday Night Live "Exchange Bank" sketch aside, changing denominations was serious business. For example, a tradesman or merchant might take in most of his income in silver or copper but need to convert an unwieldy mass of low-denomination coins into easy-to-handle higher denominations for easy transportation. Because of the scarcity of money, this was a service for which somebody with a lot of coin could charge a small but not insignificant fee. Coin changers could also take coins minted in one place and convert them to an equivalent value in another currency based on their precious metal content (taking a cut, of course).

What many low-tech economies *didn't* have was the idea of a bank as a place to keep money. It was a concept which evolved through the Middle Ages and Renaissance in small steps. Among the earliest forms of deposit banks in Europe was the financial service offered by the Templars and other monastic orders during the Crusades. Crusaders could give money or goods to the order through a local monastery in return for a *letter of credit*. The letter identified the bearer and the amount deposited, and it could be exchanged for money and goods at another monastery once the Crusader reached the Holy Land. It was far more portable and secure than a bag of money; a thief wouldn't match the description in the letter, and if it were lost, the legitimate bearer had the option of going home and requesting a new copy (although that could be difficult if he was already near his destination; PCs in a distant land might have to expend considerable energy chasing after a lost letter of credit). In time, some wealthy merchant houses with a presence in different cities began to provide similar services to profit from the trade of other merchants.

The idea of standing deposits grew out of the idea of letters of credit. If money could be held securely by a third party while one traveled far away, why not have that same third party hold money while one stayed at home? The depositor would be relieved of the need to keep and carry sacks of coin (which could be stolen) or count it out (possibly

inaccurately). Instead, when a large transaction needed to be made, both parties could simply go to the banker and have him transfer the amount from one account to another. Meanwhile, the banker could loan out the coin he had on hand for profit. And so the deposit bank was born. Banks dealing solely in deposits used in local transactions could be much smaller (they could be one man or one small family) and therefore much more numerous than "international" merchant banks which issued overseas letters of credit.

Despite the convenience of deposit banking and letters of credit, these ideas were slow to catch on because early banks were essentially unreliable. Bankers could and often did overextend themselves, making unwise loans or borrowing too much (bankers often borrowed from other bankers to amass capital for larger, higher interest loans) and losing their deposits. At any rate, banking services were exclusively for the rich and powerful (the accounting overhead in dealing with small deposits made them unprofitable) and used only for large transactions. A wealthy merchant might use the services of a banker as little as twenty or thirty times a year; an average of one transaction every two days would be extremely frequent. A merchant or nobleman might have reason to use a bank, but the average adventurer won't. Most characters will have to keep their savings under the mattress or in a well-secured pouch. On the other hand, if a party of adventurers kills a dragon and brings a wagon-load of gold back to town . . .

Money lenders were never popular. Commonly held attitudes about the shiftlessness of merchants went double for them, and then as now people tended to resent their debtors. A money-lending character might be fabulously wealthy and have connections to any number of powerful figures in society. Indeed, a particularly wealthy money lender would have remarkable access to aristocrats and could hope to hobnob with princes and kings. But he'd also probably have a negative reputation and a socially precarious position. Bankers might be the target of riots and other civil disturbances in bad times. Worse yet, their connections to powerful rulers were a bit dubious when push came to shove. The same noblemen who might protect them in troubled times might also be heavily in debt to them ("conflict of interest" is not a term current in most of ancient law). If an angry mob of townsfolk was advancing on the moneylender's house, a ruler would have the choice between sending out the troops or letting the banker's records of his heavy gambling debts go up in smoke. Indeed, if the ruler were particularly intemperate and indebted, the moneylender might find himself on the wrong end of trumped up criminal charges. In dark times, a wealthy money lender would probably be very happy to have a batch of tough adventurers ready to get him out of tight spots or, in particularly bad spots, out of the country.

One purely cultural aspect of early banking is that periodically much of it was performed by religious and ethnic minorities. For various doctrinal reasons, Medieval Christians were prohibited from loaning to other Christians for interest, and Muslims were prohibited from loaning to other Muslims. As a result, Jews were employed as middlemen in Catholic Europe and both Jews and Christians performed that office in the Muslim world. For example, person A, a Muslim, would want to loan money to person C, another Muslim. Person A would actually make a loan to person B (or person Beth, if he's a Jew), who would then immediately loan that money to person C. One can imagine an ethnic character to banking in fantasy worlds as well, with, say, gold-rich dwarves dominating money lending or long-lived elves carefully regulating deposit banking. At any rate, the minority character of money lending made it a doubly dangerous occupation. Because many minorities had limited legal rights, they were that much more vulnerable to popular unrest, and it was that much easier for a ruler to regard them as useful but disposable.

To obtain a loan, a character must make a successful Merchant skill roll. His Merchant skill is subject to *double* the area familiarity penalties discussed in Making Connections above (bankers are sensibly reluctant to loan to people without local ties) and to the same modifiers for size of transaction and overall economic conditions in Barter, Cash, and Scarcity. The basic interest rate is 20%; the roll may be modified by +1 for every additional point of interest, or -1 for every *half* point of interest below that level. The roll is further modified for the character's wealth as follows:

Dead Broke:	-10
Poor:	-5
Struggling:	-2
Comfortable:	+1
Wealthy:	+3

Very Wealthy: +5

Filthy Rich or better: +8

Monopolies

Sometimes, charm and money aren't enough. Merchants may be prohibited from dealing in the most profitable goods. Far from prohibiting monopolies, many low-tech governments actively supported them. The best-known examples of government-maintained monopolies are relatively modern (for example, early modern companies chartered by European governments with exclusive rights to trade with India and the Far East), but the practice is as least as old as the Roman empire's control of the salt trade. A government might conduct trade in particular goods as a direct source of revenue or, more often, charter a merchant or group of merchants with exclusive rights to trade in specific goods or in a particular region in return for a substantial payment. Merchants attempting to compete would face not only an entrenched competitor, but also criminal prosecution. Because governments declared monopolies on preferred goods or trading areas, the franchise on a monopoly could be extraordinarily lucrative. A merchant would go to considerable trouble and expense to obtain one, and lesser merchants might make similar efforts to ally themselves with a monopoly holder. Obviously, the existence of monopolies might lead to the same kinds of adventure possibilities inherent in any other setting where people jockey for money and power. Characters pursuing a monopoly might try to befriend the current monopoly holder to get a piece of the action, eliminate him and take his place, or attempt to persuade the government to change the rules and include them in the monopoly. Particularly action-oriented characters might even resort to smuggling.

One special form of farming out a monopoly bears mentioning: tax farming. In some ancient societies, particularly large kingdoms and empires, the business of tax collection was sold off just as monopolies on goods were. The publican (a term which, alas, has nothing to do with pubs) would have the right to collect a specific tax (for example, rents on tenants' farmland but not an additional per capita tax, or duties on silk but not duties on wool) in return for what was usually a lump sum. He would, of course, have to bear the costs of the tax collection himself, but if he collected more than he was required to turn over to the government, he got to keep the excess. Tax collecting could be extremely profitable, but if people disliked merchants and bankers, they *hated* publicans. Working for a tax collector might lead to interesting moral dilemmas for PCs. For example, should they collect the legally owed rents from an aged grandmother, or should they leave her enough to live on until the next harvest?

Pyramid Review

The Crucible of Freya (for d20)

Published by [Necromancer Games](#)



Written by Clark Peterson & Bill Webb

48 pages; \$7.99

Crucible of Freya is the first module released by Necromancer games for their new Sword & Sorcery line of *d20* system products. The quality of the book it self is very good, with a lot of attention obviously being paid to layout and interior art.

This isn't surprising, considering that Necromancer is closely associated with White Wolf games, or that the Sword & Sorcery line is headed up by Ken Cliffe, a White Wolf alumni with a proven track record. The writing is clear and informative, without being distracting. Art-wise the book is very clean and subtly reminiscent of first edition; the format of the book is likewise easily comprehensible easily referenced with little difficulty locating the various sections. The book's three maps are straightforward, though the wilderness map is a little uninspiring. Anyone familiar with any of the various incarnations of *D&D* will have very little difficulty picking up this product and running it.

Chapter one is an introduction to the adventure and includes a module overview, background, and a lot of advice for running the adventure; this is all very informative and designed to assist a novice DM run the module quickly.

(SPOILER ALERT)

The adventure itself revolves around the theft of a valuable artifact from the temple of Freya and the party's quest to retrieve the artifact. Fairhill is a small town beleaguered by the forces of evil, as evil forces tend to do. The party wanders into this town and become involved in the action almost immediately. The set up is pretty basic; on the other hand, it *is* an introductory adventure, vaguely reminiscent of the classic *Dungeons & Dragons* adventure *Keep on the Borderlands*. There are a few surprises in the adventure portion of the module, and the work seems to have a slight identity crisis; it's difficult to determine if it's a bad thing of not.

Chapter two is called Areas of Adventure and gives an overview of the town of Fairhill, the wilderness surrounding it, and its occupants (both humanoid and other). Nineteen pages detail the town and its major npcs in enough detail to allow Fairhill to serve as a home base for a fledgling party. There are thirteen keyed locations (three of which are taverns) and 11 NPCs, all of which are detailed enough to give the town its own character. I was surprised than a few of the locations were detailed in much the same way a dungeon room would be. I really hope it isn't necessary to know how much the jewelry of Fendrin's recently dead wife is worth, or the contents of the Magistrate's lockbox. Also included in chapter two is a room by room description of a ruined keep which is well stocked with adversaries and obviously meant to be explored and cleansed by the party (this becomes important in the adventure itself).

Chapter three contains the adventure itself, and as beginning adventures go it is somewhat linear. Evil creatures attack, you find their home and make them regret it . . . pretty much standard fantasy adventure plotline #4. In this case it is the ruined keep detailed in chapter two. Once the party find the keep, they simply have to attack it and retrieve the module's namesake: simple -- maybe. At first glance it seems uninspired, but there are a few twists than make it interesting. In fact, the threat level of the keep's occupants may be more that a beginning party can handle and the adventure is designed to allow the party to "siege" the keep. It would have been nice to be able to call upon Fairhill's town guard to aid in the siege, but alas "real" adventurers wouldn't call for help. As introductory adventures go, *Crucible of Freya* was nice, and being able to retreat back to Fairhill to rest between assaults almost guarantees that the party will become attached to the town as well as being well rested & healed, especially as the module's main bad

guy is very challenging for beginning players.

Crucible of Freya is billed as being "a challenging introductory adventure for four to six characters of 1st or 2nd level" -- challenging might be an understatement. Most 1st level adventures are designed to ease new players into the world as well as the game system, by slowly increasing the challenges in the adventure as it progresses. This adventure contains a number of set encounters in the wilderness area that contain creatures with challenge ratings far higher than 1-2 level parties can face. Most of these encounters are scripted to have "outs" for the party to survive or at least have a chance to survive them. Still, there is little chance of a beginning party facing off against a hunting Manticore or EL 6 Troll. These encounters are a little out of the league of beginning parties, especially when an EL 6 Troll can look much the same as a mundane one.

Fairhill contains many rumors that are intended to lead the party out into the wilderness seeking adventure, possibly finding only their death. If the DM is wily and keeps to the module's storyline, ***Crucible of Freya*** is an excellent adventure, and is very reminiscent of original ***D&D***. The plot is straightforward and gives all character classes an opportunity to share the limelight. Thieves get to sneak and pick locks, and there is plenty of combat to keep both fighters and clerics busy. Fairhill itself is interesting, though references to legends, locations, and people which will be featured in future Necromancer Games releases could be tiresome to some readers. If your players are not prone to killing everything they meet, they will probably enjoy this module. If your party is of the "Hack and Slash" variety and would sooner die than retreat, then *Crucible* will most likely give them an opportunity for the former once they have their first wilderness encounter. I'm still not sure if this is an entirely bad design philosophy, but it will certainly make players less impulsive, which certainly isn't bad.

(END SPOILER ALERT)

(Editor's Note: Necromancer Games' website has a free 23-page supplement of additional material available for those who have purchased this adventure.)

-- Andrew Lucas

Pyramid Review

Rain o' Terror (for Deadlands)

Published by [Pinnacle Entertainment Group](#)



Written by Anthony Ragan

\$15.00

*(SPOILER ALERT: The following review contains some information that may reveal more about the **Deadlands** setting than players generally know.)*

Pinnacle Entertainment Group's **Rain o' Terror**, by Anthony Ragan, is an adventure for an experienced posse ready to make an impact on the future of the Weird West. The adventure balances fast-paced combat with investigation and problem solving, giving almost any posse member a moment to shine. In addition, the posse will be rubbing shoulders with some of the big players of the **Deadlands** universe while helping to determine the political future of California. While this adventure was written for **Deadlands** players and Marshals, it can be easily converted to any steampunk setting. It can also be shifted to other settings with some more planning and work. No matter what the setting, however, **Rain o' Terror** will challenge and entertain player and gamemaster alike.

Rain o' Terror is primarily set in the tense world of post-Knicknevin California. The adventure is designed to allow Marshals to link this adventure to **Ghostbusters**, although it is not necessary to have run this adventure prior to running **Rain o' Terror**. In this adventure, the players are hired to protect The Proletariat — the airship of Collegium mad scientist Fineas von Landingham — and its cargo: a Ghost Rock bomb capable of creating a 5-mile wide Deadland. The airship and bomb, of course, are stolen and the posse will find themselves leaving Gomorra for Shan Fan and Sacramento, eventually becoming embroiled in the brewing referendum to decide if California will continue to support the Union, join in with the Confederacy, or strike off on its own as the Bear Flag Republic. Behind all these events lurk some of the Weird West's major powers: the USA, CSA, Hellstrome, and Grimme.

The pacing of **Rain o' Terror** is impressive. The posse will be kept on their toes and challenged at every turn. The challenges are interesting but not so obscure that Marshals will have to worry about redirecting posses that have gotten off-track. Several of the encounters are quite chilling . . . even for a horror game. It is important that the posse is well balanced, and helps if there is at least one Mad Scientist. Those posses who have some contacts in Shan Fan will find themselves at some advantage but not so great an advantage to upset the adventure's design. Marshals may find it helpful to have a copy of **The Great Maze** and **Doomtown or Bust** to help flesh out the posse's stays in Shan Fan and Gomorra, but neither is required. **Rain o' Terror** provides quick introductions to both locations and more than enough information for the Marshal to comfortably introduce the posse to these locations. Indeed, the information in **Doomtown or Bust** is sufficiently "out of date" (it details pre-Knicknevin Gomorra) to be of relatively limited use unless you intend to use Gomorra as a base of operations for your posse.

Conversion to other systems is relatively easy for campaigns in a steampunk setting. Airships and doomsday weapons are the stuff of such worlds, like **Castle Falkenstein** and **GURPS: Steampunk**. Moving the adventure into a non-steampunk setting involves a bit more work, yet it is possible. Von Landingham's airship, for example, could become a gnome's masterwork carrying an archmage's spell held in stasis in a **Dungeons and Dragons** game. While such a conversion would entail some work, the forthcoming **d20 Deadlands** will make this process easier.

All in all, **Rain o' Terror** is a great purchase for players of **Deadlands** and other games at \$15. Those who purchased **Rain o' Terror** as a PDF file during the short-lived alliance between Pinnacle and Cybergames can purchase a hard copy at a reduced rate and should contact PEG directly. As the part of a three-part story arc (**Ghostbusters**, **Rain o'**

Terror, and Christopher L. McGlothlin upcoming *Dead Presidents*), this adventure helps weave your posse into the world of *Deadlands*.

-- *Matthew DeForrest*

Pyramid Pick

Pokéthulhu Adventure Game

Published by [Dork Storm Press](#)

Written by S. John Ross and Philip Reed

Illustrated by John Kovalic



32 pages; \$5.95

Based upon a concept by Philip Reed and Russell Godwin, and written by S. John Ross and illustrated by John Kovalic, *The Pokéthulhu Adventure Game* was originally seen at Gen-Con 2000. Since then, anyone who wasn't there has had to make do with the still excellent T-shirt. Now Dork Storm Press has published the game in comic book format. For those not in the know, the concept behind *Pokéthulhu* is that it is a parody of a certain Japanese children's cartoon that has become a worldwide phenomenon using the Mythos of author H. P. Lovecraft.

Actually, *Pokéthulhu The Adventure Game* is based upon a cartoon broadcast on the Lovecraft Network. The players are cast in the same roles as little Randy Carter, Sonia, and Titus. These young cultists capture, raise, and train Pokéthulhu. These loveable eldritch monsters are pitted by their owners against other Pokéthulhu, not for the purposes of evil, but purely for sport. Only the dreaded Team Eibon have motives that are decidedly un-sportsman-like. This is a world that only the young (or an insane adult witch or wizard) can understand, as it would scare the trousers of normal adults.

After a fun introduction to roleplaying from the Dork Tower crew (which will look familiar to *Pyramid*-readers, we get down to the game. Players each create a trainer, spending thirty points to define their scores in Grade Level (their normal education), Phys Ed (all physical aspects of a character bar sneakiness), Pokéthulhu Lore, Shoplifting (stealth and stealing), Sanity, and Talking Trash (fast talk). Scored between one and twelve, one ability is designated as being lucky for that trainer. Grade Level determines a trainer's age, and adding either Grade Level or Pokéthulhu Lore to their Sanity cannot exceed thirteen.

The game system is very simple, requiring three "Shining Dodecahedrons" (twelve-sided dice). Abilities are tested by rolling up to three dice -- the more difficult the desired action, the less dice rolled -- and if any result is equal or less than the ability being tested, the roll is successful. If the ability has been designated as lucky for the trainer, then three dice are rolled whatever the difficulty.

Once created, trainers grab a copy of the Pokénomicon, the book of elder lore used together with Shining Dodecahedrons to capture and store individual Pokéthulhu. These cute eldritch beasts can be given to the trainers as gifts (as happens in the book's first adventure seed) or captured from the wild. The most important factor to any Pokéthulhu are their aspects, which are described as their essential spiritual resonances. Each Pokéthulhu has three, one of which is actually their weakness. Likewise, trainers also have an aspect, for which they have an affinity with Pokéthulhu of the same aspect. For example, Randy Carter's own aspect is "Squamous," but his favourite Pokéthulhu, Pikathulhu, has the aspects of "Fungous" and "Luminescent" with a weakness of "Sticky." There are eight given aspects, all of which have been taken from the television series.

Seven Pokéthulhu are detailed, plus a variant; this includes the three winners of a design competition held via the

Internet. This leads to one of the only deficiencies about the game: there aren't enough Pokéthulhu detailed here! Another ten or so are mentioned throughout the book, such as Jigglypolyp and Tindaloo, the Non-Euclidean puppy escapee from the Cheap Curry Dimension. It would have been nice to see some more described, but given a copy of a certain horror game and access to a certain kid's cartoon, any self-respecting Owner of Arcane Rules (as the GM is known in this game) should be able to create his own.

Apart from the simple combat and training rules, the bulk of the book is made up of Philip Reed's five adventure seeds and S. John Ross' full-blown adventure, "Over Cold Mountain." The seeds form the basis for a campaign or series, and are designed to have other adventures slotted in around them. In fact, they work better than "Over Cold Mountain." This is not to detract from Ross' scenario, which is rather fun, but the seeds parody that certain kid's cartoon to greater effect. Rounding out the book are Trainer and Pokéthulhu sheets as well as a set of paper minis for the Owner of Arcane Rules to photocopy and use.

There is still room in this game world for more material. A Pokénomicon detailing more Pokéthulhu would be welcome, as well as something covering Team Eibon. Although mentioned in the book, and having their chant appear on its back cover, no more information about Randy Carter's rivals is given.

Once in a while something comes out that makes every gamer sit up and go, "Cool!" The latest in the list of games to elicit such a response is *Pokéthulhu The Adventure Game*. This isn't a game for the kids, but one for us big kids who get the joke. (Unless of course, you've already let them in on the secret and got them worshipping early. In that case, well done!) This is a hugely fun yet simple game of Non-Euclidean proportions, which really must be thine!

-- *Matthew Pook(émon)*

Murphy's Rules



by John Kovalic

Murphy's Rules



Murphy's Rules



Dork Tower!



Dork Tower!



Playing Chicken

A friend of mine, Robert, was in a fantasy RPG one time . . . a game, I might add, I had nothing to do with. And Robert -- along with the rest of the group -- wasn't having any fun with the GM's dungeon. (As an aside, this is the same GM we wrote about in this year's [April Fool](#) column.)

So at one point there is a dungeon room with miniature twelve demon statues; the heroes need to find the one that weighs differently from the other 11, but they only have three uses of a magic scale to determine this. (Puzzle enthusiasts will recognize this as the classic coin-weighing puzzle, with the serial numbers filed off.) If they choose incorrectly, the eleven identical statues will animate, and the party will surely be torn apart by the blood-thirsty demons.

The players sigh, and begin to try to remember how to do that puzzle. But before they can get too far, Robert picks up a 12-sided die and rolls it. "I choose the eighth one," he says, obeying the result of the die.

"Are you sure you want to do that?" asked the GM. "The odds of randomly choosing the right one are pretty slim . . ."

"Well," said Robert, "the way I see it there are two possibilities. Either I randomly chose the right one, and we get to go on without doing one of these bull puzzles; or I chose wrong and we all die, leaving us an opportunity to do something fun with the rest of the evening. It's a win-win scenario, as best I can tell."

The gaming group dissolved shortly thereafter.

Anyway, there are a dozen lessons that can be gleaned from that anecdote, but today I'm going to focus on one:

Are you, as the GM, prepared to blow up the world? Are you, as a player, prepared to make the GM blow up the world?

A couple of weeks ago I talked about how to maintain an epic feel in your campaign without making the players feel so overwhelmed that they feel the need to go get help. But that begs the question, if you *do* run or play in something that epic, are there really any consequences for failure? If the presumption is success, and the game world can't continue without success, then there's a tremendous pressure on the GM to allow them to succeed. And, more insidiously, there is sometimes a slight pressure on the players to try and fail; after all, he wouldn't *really* blow up the world, would he? It can become a game of chicken, with both sides knowing that the GM wouldn't possibly end everything.

In my mind, as a GM, that can be dangerous. Once the players believe that something *won't* happen, any threats to make that thing happen can seem empty and hollow.

"The world will blow up in an hour unless you find the bomb!"

"Ohmigosh, really? I make nachos!"

(As an aside, this same tendency can also be a powerful tool. For example, my players know that I probably won't kill their characters, unless they bathe with toasters or similar suicidal actions. As a result they are encouraged to try things that are riskier and more cinematic than they might normally, since the risks of bodily maiming aren't as prevalent . . . which is just the kind of game I usually want to run.)

One of the highest compliments a player ever gave my GMing style was to say that they didn't know *what* I was capable of; there was no such thing as being safe or knowing that it would all work out all right. As a result, that made her (and the other players) work that much harder to accomplish their goals . . . which made their victories all the more exciting.

The *AD&D* adventure *The Apocalypse Stone* all but presumes that the heroes will fail, and provides a "no shame in

losing" kind of mechanism if the world *does* come to an end because of their failure. But it also leaves the glimmer of hope that the just *might* succeed.

So for this week I want to leave you with the idea that in my opinion, whatever you need to do to make your players believe you'll blow up the earth, do it. Blow up another planet. Blow up a beloved city. Take the heroes to an alternate dimension; blow that up. Make the heroes love an NPC. Blow him up. Conspire with a player who's playing a character that he doesn't like; blow the character up. Take the heroes to a possible future where everything's blown up. And so on.

I've done all of these things (and more) in my games. And nineteen times out of twenty, the heroes save the day and everything's right as rain. But it's the possibility of the twentieth that makes the other nineteen victories possible.

Oh, and make sure your players are having fun. Otherwise, they'll mutiny and try to blow *themselves* up.

* * *

I've been forgetting to mention it, but I thought I should plug a gamer-type summer movie that came out a week ago. Called *A Knight's Tale*, it's a medieval story about a young man who becomes a jousting knight and . . . um . . . jousts. I think there was a love story or some other subplots in there, but ignore them; they'll only hurt you. This is a summer movie.

I won't lie and say it's a good movie, but I felt it was a *fun* movie. It's a gamer movie; you can see the PCs gathering and envision the interaction, and it feels like the DVD to have the side-by-side feature of reading the GM's notes. Plus any film that has an ultra-cool Chaucer as a major protagonist is a winner in my book. And the soundtrack includes "We Will Rock You" and "Low Rider" . . . proving quite handily one of my comments from a while ago about [using different music genres](#).

* * *

Unfortunately the real world has attacked another *Pyramid* regular, and **Kenneth Hite's** column for this week has been eaten the the aether. Hopefully things will be back to normal next week for our own Illuminated Journalist. Good luck, Ken!

-- *Steven Marsh*

* * *

(*Last week's answer*) ***Star Trek: The Next Generation RPG***

(*Three stars*) "Pearl can lift almost anyone over her head. She likes sports, Theater, and beating people up."



by Elizabeth McCoy

This college of magic was researched and designed by an IOU double-major: College of Metaphysics and School of Performing Creative Arts. It is, effectively, a subset of the Making and Breaking college (p. M51) and therefore the spells listed would be usable by a One College (Making & Breaking) mage, though a more-limited Magery might only permit Clothes magic.

It should be noted that this could also be called "the Fabric College," as the same spells will allow one to work with drapes, slipcovers, or even upholstery; however, most masters of the following spells prefer to use it for clothing. (Most are also possessed of the advantage of Fashion Sense.)

All Clothes spells have a prerequisite of a suitable mundane skill, such as Professional Skill: Fashion Designer or Professional Skill: Seamstress/Tailor. Attempting to cast these spells without a sufficient knowledge of the underlying skill tends to produce very crude results, and no teacher of the College would tolerate that.

In all cases, an "outfit" is what would be required to clothe a single person. This may be a dress, pants and a shirt, or an entire suit with coat and tie. Socks and underwear will also be included when appropriate materials are provided, or with Create Clothing (below). An "item" is a single item: a dress, a shirt, a single sock, etc.

Other spells from *[GURPS Magic](#)* which are considered part of the Clothing College are: Measurement (p. M47), Dye, Clean, Rejoin, Repair, Knots (pp. M51-52), and, strangely, Enchant, Fortify, Deflect, and Lighten (pp. M38-41). Spells which can affect clothing may be used when Enchanting clothing, such as Resist Fire or Resist Cold, even if the mage has One-College (Clothing) Magery. Spells from *[GURPS Grimoire](#)* which should count are: Haircut (p. G16; useful for getting wool), Prepare Game (p. G43; useful for getting leather materials), Inscribe (p. G56; for more magical patterns), Duplicate (p. G56), and Fasten (p. G67).

Seek Clothes

Information

Useful for finding your clothing in the dark, or the last pair of clean underwear in the pile on your dorm room floor. This spell allows the caster to sense the nearest item that fits the description. (This may be "my pants" or "clean socks." A truly detailed description, such as "A red leather corset done up with silver laces and a latex over-pattern, with a hidden pocket containing a credit card," will carry a penalty -- usually around -1 to -5, but it could be more, depending on how much the GM thinks the spell is being abused.)

*Cost: 1.
(This is also a Knowledge College spell.)*

Know Pattern

Information

With a successful casting upon an item of clothing within the caster's sight, the mage will know what pattern was used to create the item. The caster may try to sketch the pattern out then and there (using an appropriate Professional Skill: Fashion Designer or Artist skill), or quickly use Cut Pattern (below). Note that this will be the pattern of the clothing as it is being worn -- if the wearer is a size 6, then the pattern will be for a size 6 person. (Something which may be annoying, if the mage is a size 8.)

If the pattern so discovered is not transcribed into a physical form (by magical or mundane means) or memorized quickly enough, the GM may require IQ rolls to duplicate it exactly, later on. These IQ rolls would have the usual bonuses for Eidetic Memory.

Cost: 1.
(This is also a Knowledge College spell.)

Memorize Pattern

Special

A variant of Memorize (p. G59), this allows the caster -- or, with a touch, anyone else -- to memorize a pattern for future use. (The pattern may be one the subject is looking at physically, or one that has just been discovered with Know Pattern (above).) The subject may store, as perfectly as if he had 60-point Eidetic Memory, up to (IQ) patterns via this spell. Memorized patterns may be "over-written" if the subject desires. (There is a rumored improved version which allows the number of memorized patterns to equal the skill with the spell or the underlying mundane skill of Seamstress/Tailor/Fashion Designer, whichever is higher.)

Cost: 3.
Time to Cast: 1 minute.
Prerequisites: Know Pattern or Memorize.
(This is also a Knowledge College and Mind Control College spell.)

Stitch

Regular

When the basic elements of clothing are assembled -- properly-cut fabric, needle, and thread -- this spell will quickly by-pass all the tedious sewing required to make a single outfit. (Pants and shirt, dress, etc.)

Cost: 2.
Prerequisite: Either Rejoin or Air Golem.
(This is also a Movement College spell.)

Undo Sewing

Regular; Special Resistance

As you sew, so shall you rip. This spell causes a designated item of clothing to come completely unstitched. If it is being worn, the clothing's occupant has a chance to grab for the unraveling thread and hang on, aborting the spell. This requires a DX roll. (The GM may rule that the degree of success of the DX roll indicates how quickly the spell was aborted, and thus to what degree the wearer is now unclothed.) A counter-casting of Stitch, Weave, or other clothing-creation spells will also cancel the Undo Sewing, as the threads upon the clothing seem to ripple and come un-done and re-done much like a Magical Girl costume change. Only without the change (probably).

Cost: 2.
Prerequisite: Either Stitch or Weave (below) or Weaken.

Mend Clothing

Regular

This is, essentially, a cheaper version of Repair, specialized for clothing. It will fix any outfit, provided there is needle and thread and appropriate patching materials. (If spells which would provide such material are known, such as Weave and Create Fabric, the physical ingredients need not be present.)

Cost: 1 per outfit.

Prerequisite: Rejoin or (Weave, Cut Pattern).

Cut Pattern

Regular

With a physical pattern (or a previous casting of Know Pattern or Memorize Pattern (both above)), and fabric, this spell will create the raw materials for a single outfit. The outfit can then be put together with Stitch, or mundane means of sewing. The spell is at a -5 to cast if the fabric has been previously worked. (E.g. if someone is trying to cut a ballgown into a pair of overalls, whether or not the ballgown is being used . . .)

Cost: 1; 3 if the fabric was previously worked.

Prerequisites: Either Undo Sewing or Weave or Reshape.

Dye Pattern

Regular

With this spell, outfit may be dyed in the pattern of the caster's choice. (One pattern per casting; the mage may wish to separate items if more than one pattern is desired.)

Duration: 2d days.

Cost: 1 for an item of clothing that provides partial body coverage, such as pants, a sock (or, in this case, a pair of socks), or a bathing suit; 3 for an outfit or item that provides extensive body coverage (such as a dress, a catsuit, or an old-style bathing suit).

Time to Cast: 5 seconds.

Prerequisite: Dye.

Weave

Regular

Given basic materials (yarn, thread, etc.), this spell will weave a bolt of fabric. With extra energy, the basic materials may be raw wool, silkworm cocoons, etc. A use of the Clean spell (p. M51) is suggested in such cases, if the material has not already been washed.

Cost: 2; 5 for raw materials.

Time to Cast: 5 seconds.

Prerequisites: Reshape or Stitch.

(This is also a Movement College spell.)

Alter Clothing

Regular; Special Resistance

The caster may alter the fit of any one outfit within sight, by means of waving her hands in the air (or actually touching the garment) with appropriate motions as if to physically sculpt the item. (At IOU, the dreaded "Wedgie Gesture" can cause many students to jump for cover.) Alas, this spell will only work on one subject-outfit at a time. Though there are always rumors of a version that will allow the caster to modify whatever she (or he) looks upon for the duration of the spell.

The effects may be resisted by contorting one's body (Double-Jointed helps), as the effective strength of the modifications is relatively weak. (Except, for some reason, the Wedgie maneuver.) Getting out of the mage's line of sight will cause the mage to be unable to modify the clothing until visual contact is once again established.

Duration: 1 minute.

Cost: 3 to cast, 2 to maintain.

Time to Cast: 2 seconds.

Prerequisites: Weave or Reshape.

(This is also a Movement College spell.)

Make Clothing

Regular

This is basically a spell that combines the effects of Cut Pattern and Stitch, and has the same basic requirements: Pattern (or appropriate prior spell), fabric, needle, and thread. If Dye or Dye Pattern are known, their effects may also be incorporated. If Weave is known, only appropriate threads are required -- and the clothing created will have no seams!

Cost: 3.

Time to Cast: 5 minutes *Prerequisites:* Cut Pattern and (Stitch or Weave).

Create Fabric

Regular

This is a specialized version of Create Object (p. M46), which is cheaper and only creates a bolt of fabric, but is otherwise identical.

Duration: Indefinite, so long as it is touching a living being.

Cost: 1 per 10 pounds of fabric created.

Time to Cast: Equal to cost, in seconds.

Prerequisites: Ten Clothing College spells or (Magery 2, Create Earth, Perfect Illusion).

(This is also an Illusion and Creation College spell.)

Create Clothing

Regular

Again, a specialized form of Create Object, permitting the (cheaper) creation of clothing -- including more complex forms than Create Object permits. (The caster must be familiar with the pattern which is being used as a template for the created clothing, however.)

Cost: 2 per outfit.

Time to Cast: 5 seconds.

Prerequisites: Memorize Pattern and (Magery 2, Create Earth, Perfect Illusion) or Create Fabric.

(This is also an Illusion and Creation College spell.)

Summon Brownies

Special

This summons 1d Brownies (also known as elves) into one's workroom. Given sufficient supplies, they will mend clothing for a period of one night or until they are disturbed. (The caster is advised to sneak out quietly after summoning them.) Once summoned, make a reaction roll for the Brownies; if it is Good or better, they will continue to appear every night and mend whatever they find. If a gift of clothing is made to them, fitted to their size and pre-made,

they will vanish immediately upon donning the clothing and a subsequent casting of the spell will be required if Brownies are once again desired. If the conditions in the area are harsh (such as a Brownie sweatshop), they may become very liberal in interpreting what a "gift of clothing" is . . . ("Oh, look! A napkin! What a wonderful hat this makes. I'm outta here.")

Duration: 1 night; anything after that is up to the Brownies.

Cost: 10.

Time to Cast: 5 minutes.

Prerequisite: Magery, and either at least one spell from 10 different colleges, or 12 Clothing spells.

(This spell is a variant of Planar Summons (p. M65) and is therefore also a Necromantic College spell.)

* * *

*(This College was inspired by a minor character in John M. Ford's **The Last Hot Time**, and by the Angel of Comfortable Clothing, who has appeared from time to time in the author's personal **In Nomine** games.)*



by Dan Howard

A staple of fantasy gaming is the stereotypical wood elf. And the elf's favorite weapon is his trusty longbow. The argument has come up that a longbow is not a practical weapon for a being who spends most of his time in the woods. It is a valid argument; the longbow is pretty useless for anyone who lives in rugged terrain. It was designed for long-distance shooting; any obstacles between the archer and the target increase the difficulty of hitting that target. Longbows were used by the English to great effect by keeping their archers back and firing a great many volleys at the enemy before they could close on them. Two hundred yards was not an uncommon distance to begin firing, and up to twelve volleys could be fired in a minute. Even an average longbowman could hit a moving target fifty yards away. In a forest there could be a great many obstacles within a distance of fifty yards, thus negating the primary advantage of the longbow. Also, any item which is longer than the person carrying it would greatly hinder the ability of that person to move through rough terrain, or in tight spaces . . . such as a dense forest. Accurately firing a longbow in this situation would be almost impossible.

In order to determine what weapons an elf might prefer, one should examine both the physical characteristics of typical elves and the environment and society in which they might live. A stereotypical elf usually lives in the forest isolated from humans. Due to this existence it would be difficult for elves to base their livelihood on agriculture. This leaves two means of subsistence: hunter/gatherer and pastoral. Both of these make large settlements impossible as resources are limited. Forest elves must therefore live in small family clans widely scattered throughout the forest.

If their existence was pastoral, their animals might include goats, pigs, and possibly deer. Elven clans would also need to be mobile, moving at least twice per year between summer and winter pastures. If they were hunter/gatherers they would rarely have a fixed abode for more than a year at a time. Either way they would not have permanent settlements. They could, however, have fixed locations at which all the clans gathered for special occasions during the year such as religious festivals and celebrations but it is unlikely that this would be a fixed residence.

It is also likely that individual clans would often be hostile to one another. In a pastoral existence a clan's wealth would be in its herds rather than in land, and adjacent clans might poach each other's livestock. In a hunter/gatherer society one clan would often encroach on the traditional hunting grounds of another when resources were scarce. Combat involves small raiding parties and tends against pitched battles in favour of hit and run guerilla tactics. Success in this sort of society would be calculated by the amount of booty brought home rather than the amount of people killed or land captured. Of course, in a High-Magic world, anything is possible. Magic would negate the problem of limited resources as well as provide advantages for communication and living conditions.

In most game systems elves are usually more agile than humans so they naturally prefer weapons that take advantage of their superior agility, such as thrown and missile weapons. In most societies weapons were usually adapted from tools used in daily existence. Spears would be of two types, both handy when hunting -- lighter javelins for throwing and heavier melee spears for more hostile prey. Throwing blades and handaxes are more portable than spears and are just as deadly against prey. Slings are an excellent inexpensive hunting weapon but a lot of space is needed to swing it about the head before releasing, so it has limited practicality amongst trees. Plus the rapid movement caused by swinging is likely to startle the prey and cause it to flee. Knives are probably the most useful of tools so every elf would carry one on his belt. Large blades such as machetes would also be extremely handy -- providing a tool for clearing undergrowth and dispatching wounded game. Balanced swords really only have one use -- combat. It is unlikely that elves would make much use of weapons such as the traditional broadsword or rapier because they usually don't have access to large amounts of good quality metal, and because they don't have a professional warrior class.

Long weapons that rely on swinging attacks would also have limited practicality when fighting amongst trees. Thrusting attacks would prevail. Spears would be the preferred melee weapon both because of its method of attack and the small amount of metal required to fashion one. Bows are, without a doubt, the best hunting weapon. As mentioned above, longbows are no use but perhaps a shorter bow could be utilised.

Heavy armor would also be a disadvantage to the elves. Firstly, because it would hamper their main advantage -- their superior agility-- and secondly, because it hinders rapid movement through their awkward terrain: dense forest, hilly ground, thick undergrowth, marshes, and unbridged rivers. Also, because of this, and because of the lack of suitable pasture, it is unlikely that elves would ride mounts.

So, we have a group of beings who live in small clans, are highly mobile, and don't have any centralized government. They are guerilla fighters who rely on agility and subterfuge rather than open combat. They wear light armor and do not utilise cavalry. Their weapons of choice are the knife or machete, spear, and bow. But what sort of bow and how could it be effectively used?

A historical parallel might best be sought here. Many of the characteristics of our elves can be attributed to many forest dwelling cultures; Medieval Wales is a good example. The Anglo-Norman invasion of Wales by Edward I can be also used to demonstrate how elves might react to an outside aggressor.

The 12th-century chronicler Gerald of Wales (Giraldus Cambrensis) gives a good account of Wales and her inhabitants. Contrary to popular belief, the English longbow was not invented by the Welsh. Most evidence suggests that it was Scandinavian in origin and introduced to England during the many Danish invasions before 1066. Gerald describes the Welsh bow:

"The bows used by these people are not made of horn, ivory, or yew, but of wild elm; unpolished, rude and uncouth, but stout; not designed to shoot an arrow to a great distance, but to inflict very severe wounds in a close fight."

Here we have the real Welsh bow. A roughly-fashioned bow no longer than the standard continental bow (otherwise Gerald would have commented on its unusual length) -- about four feet long, made of elm, with a short range but great power. Much more practical for woodlands use than a six-foot longbow. Welsh bows were fired at close range, as an ambush weapon -- a perfect bow for our elves. During fighting at Abergavenny Castle, a Welsh arrow was recorded to have penetrated a horseman's mail-covered leg, through his saddle, and into his horse far enough to kill it; another arrow was fired 4" into a solid oak door.

Using this description we can approximate *GURPS* stats for such a weapon.

Weapon	Type	Amt.	SS	Acc	1/2Dam.	Max.	Cost	Weight	Min ST	Notes
Welsh/Elven bow	imp	thr+3	13	2	STx12	STx18	\$150	3lbs	10	Max dam.1d+4.

Note that standard arrows are not suitable for this weapon. Welsh arrows are shorter and heavier than longbow arrows. The extra weight reduces the weapon's range but increases its damage at short distances. Larger flights help stabilize the missile. These arrows cost the same as normal arrows but are double their weight and cannot be used with any other sort of bow. Likewise, normal arrows cannot be used with this bow.

The tactics used by Welsh armies were orchestrated to suit the rough terrain -- this was often the main weapon against the invading English. Battle was preferred on marshy or broken ground, which favored the Welsh's mobility over the clumsy, heavily armored English knights. Often the Welsh would break off and feign retreat to lure the enemy into prearranged traps. Tactics consisted mainly of ambushes and raids. Gerald noted that they "stole anything they could lay their hands on and lived on plunder, theft and robbery." Here we see the tendency to concentrate on booty rather than killing. If the enemy could never have a decisive battle then it was hoped they would eventually be demoralised enough to give up and go home.

So how does one counter this sort of tactic? Edward's campaign is a good example. As his main body moved along, it

was preceded by 1,800 axmen who cleared a wide path through the woods, depriving Welsh troops of cover from which to harass Edward's army. If these axemen were Welsh prisoners of war, the enemy would be less willing to attack them. At strategic points along the way Edward left strong detachments to construct defensive fortifications such as Flint and Rhuddlan Castles. He rarely made direct assaults on Welsh strongholds, instead he ravaged the land and took their food stores and livestock. His troops were supplied from the sea. He also adopted the Roman strategy of divide and conquer -- picking the weaker of two rival clans and giving them assistance against their stronger rival -- thus destroying the stronger clan and having the weaker one indebted to him.

In conclusion it does seem possible for elves to use bows in their natural terrain -- providing they choose a suitable bow and adopt practical tactics. The Welsh provide an excellent example by using compact bows for short-ranged ambushes. Avoidance of pitched melees is of paramount importance, for they would be decimated by more heavily armed and better trained troops.

* * *

Special thanks to Kromm both for the original idea and his suggestions.

Scottish Terror: The Monster of Glamis

*"But evil things, in robes of sorrow,
Assailed the monarch's high estate;
(Ah, let us mourn, for never morrow
Shall dawn upon him desolate!)
And round about his home the glory
That blushed and bloomed,
Is but a dim-remembered story
Of the old time entombed.
And travellers now within that valley
Through the red-litten windows see
Vast forms that move fantastically
To a discordant melody . . . "*
-- Edgar Allan Poe, "The Haunted Palace"

In the North, between the River Tay and the lowering scarp of the Scottish Highlands, a thousand-year-old castle crouches over the town of Glamis. Within the castle, and within its thousand years, murders, devils, faerie, kings, treason, and phantoms swirl, an incarnadine accretion disk surrounding the black hole of the British monarchy. Deep in the battlements of Glamis, deep in the legendary substrate of the island itself, the Monster of Glamis roars. Let's talk of the death of kings, and listen for the echoes.

"More recently, it has been reported that Lady Elphinstone, sister of the Queen Mother, remembered being very frightened as a young girl of the sinister atmosphere in the rooms where Duncan is said to have been murdered."
-- Antony D. Hippisley Coxe, *Haunted Britain*

Glamis Castle first appears in history as a royal hunting lodge where the grievously wounded King Malcolm II came to bleed his last in 1034. Legend, bolstered by Shakespeare, has it that Macbeth killed Malcolm's grandson Duncan at Glamis Castle seven years later, and then died himself on nearby Dunsinane Hill. When the Stuarts themselves usurped Duncan's heirs, King Robert II (the first Stuart king of Scotland) granted the thaneage of Glamis to Sir John Lyon of Forteviot. Again, Glamis claimed blood -- Sir James Lindsay murdered Sir John in his bed.

King James V had the widow of the 6th Laird Glamis burnt at the stake as a witch in 1537 and seized Glamis Castle for his own, stripping it of its valuables. He died too early to extirpate the Lyon line, however; Glamis returned to the young 7th Laird in 1542, and the Lyons returned to favor under Mary, Queen of Scots and her son James VI. After James VI became King of England in 1603, he created Patrick Lyon, 9th Laird Glamis, the Earl of Kinghorne. Although the family supported the Covenanters, they somehow remained in the Stuarts' good graces; upon the Restoration, King Charles II created Patrick Lyon, 11th Laird Glamis, the Earl of Strathmore. The Earls supported the Stuarts through exile (the Old Pretender stayed at Glamis in 1716), and returned to prominence when Lady Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon (daughter of the 14th Earl of Strathmore) married the future King George VI in 1923. Princess Margaret was born at Glamis in 1930 -- due to the 14th Earl's peculiar delay in registering the birth, nobody quite knows where Lady Elizabeth, the Queen Mother, was born.

"After a very hospitable reception from the late Peter Proctor, Esq., then seneschal of the castle, in Lord Strathmore's absence, I was conducted to my apartment in a distant corner of the building. I must own, that as I heard door after door shut, after my conductor had retired, I began to consider myself too far from the living and somewhat too near the dead."

-- Sir Walter Scott, *Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft*

With two royal deaths, Glamis Castle started off with plenty of spiritual magnetism, and Glamis Castle has only been accumulating further ghosts ever since. The unjustly burnt Lady Janet Douglas haunts the Clock Tower as a "white lady," a "dark man" disappears through the walls, an "armored figure" and an "old hag" often hover over sleeping guests, a "huge dead man" warms himself before one fireplace, and a "gray lady" haunts the Chapel of St. Michael.

Other ghosts include the "hanged man," the "black boy," and the "tongueless woman," who shrieks at an upper window before being dragged away, and sometimes runs across the grounds tearing at her bleeding mouth. Another ghost, "Jack the Runner," sprints across the grounds in a manner not unlike that of our old nemesis [Spring-Heeled Jack](#). Finally, there is the ghost of "Earl Beardie," the 4th Earl of Crawford (grandson of the murderer of Sir John Lyon). Accused of cheating by the 3rd Laird Glamis, he swore that he'd play cards with the Devil if nobody trusted him. The Devil promptly appeared and shut himself up in a room with Beardie, where they still play cards to this day.

"If you wish to please me, you will never mention the matter of the chamber to me, for I have seen inside the secret room. I can only say that if you could guess the nature of the secret, you would go down on your knees and thank God it was not yours."

-- Claude Bowes-Lyon, 13th Earl of Strathmore, to his wife (1870)

That room in the West Tower is but one of the secret rooms of Castle Glamis. In addition to the card room, there is a Haunted Chamber where the Lyons immured members of the Ogilvy clan and left them to die by starvation and cannibalism. A party of young rakes once took advantage of the Earl's absence to hang sheets and towels out of every window in the Castle to find the secret chamber, but when they trooped outdoors no less than *seven* windows showed no linen. The Earl's return ended the experiment; the quick attention of the Earls of Strathmore and their proctors has also prevented workmen from exploring numerous secret passages. In one celebrated case, a stonemason was well-paid to emigrate to Australia shortly after doing some work at Castle Glamis -- or, at least, that's what the Earls of Strathmore *said* happened to him.

"It was the ghoulish shade of decay, antiquity, and dissolution; the putrid, dripping eidolon of unwholesome revelation, the awful baring of that which the merciful earth should always hide. God knows it was not of this world -- or no longer of this world -- yet to my horror I saw in its eaten-away and bone-revealing outlines a leering, abhorrent travesty on the human shape; and in its mouldy, disintegrating apparel an unspeakable quality that chilled me even more."

-- H.P. Lovecraft, "The Outsider"

Or he may have become a victim of the Monster of Glamis. This misshapen creature, a "flabby egg" with spidery (but amazingly strong) limbs, supposedly appears in the Glamis bloodline every so often, and must be immured in a secret room. The secret of the Monster, so the story goes, is revealed to each Earl of Strathmore on his 21st birthday so that only the current Earl, his heir, and a chosen steward know the hideous truth. Some tales call the Monster a vampire, others refer to it as a "dwarf." Since the turn of the century, speculation has centered on a badly deformed child born as the "rightful heir" to Castle Glamis and sealed up in the room to avoid the embarrassment of the family. The investigator Paul Bloomfield has found a record of the first-born son of the 11th Earl Strathmore, reported as dead within a month of his birth in October of 1821, but (in this theory) actually a living but deformed (possibly Down's syndrome suffering) child kept imprisoned (until his death in the 1870s) as a merciful alternative to either ridicule or infanticide. Bloomfield claims that earlier reports of a monster at Glamis either refer to other ghosts or are opportunistic fictions planted by the Strathmores to confuse the issue.

*"Still it cried, 'Sleep no more!' to all the house:
'Glamis hath murder'd sleep, and therefore Cawdor
Shall sleep no more, Macbeth shall sleep no more!'"*

-- William Shakespeare, *Macbeth* II:ii, 53-55

Which is as good a place as any to discuss the greatest fiction of all involving Glamis, Shakespeare's "Scottish tragedy," *Macbeth*. Patrick, 9th Laird Glamis, may have met Shakespeare in London at the court of King James -- where [Shakespeare](#) likely debuted the play in 1606, the year the Lairds of Glamis became Earls of Kinghorne. Throughout the play, from the "bloody child" to the killer "not born of woman," the Monster casts his shadow. Shakespeare's text, full of imprecations against time and destiny, with its witches ("secret, black, and midnight hags"), ghosts, and demonic fertility rites ("unsex me, spirits") dramaturgically recapitulates Glamis Castle -- which Shakespeare subtly recasts as a bastion of Hell on Earth. Patrick Lyon may have done the same -- he rebuilt and renovated Glamis Castle using the designs of the Vitruvian master of [sacred architecture](#), Inigo Jones. Did the 9th Laird build folds in "the great shoal of time" into his battlements, seven windows (one for each planet) looking out

from secret chambers embedded in hidden dimensions?

"This was the result of the first attempt to create a royal moonchild, two hundred years ago. The baby's body and brain warped under the pressure of the ultradimensional emanation it was made to contain. Nevertheless, this is the rightful heir of the Earl of Strathmore, and our future monarch."

-- Sir Miles Delacourt, in *The Invisibles* #11 (first series), by Grant Morrison

Glamis has long been [Faerie](#) country; how many of Glamis Castle's ghosts are actually fays or other [ultraterrestrials](#)? Even before the castle, Glamis was a magical place with a "holy well," a no doubt ley-riven locality associated with dragon energies. The River Dean, which runs through Glamis, legendarily demands a life every seven years, a period eerily similar to the mythic Faerie Teind to Hell or to the ancient term of the British sacred king (according to Margaret Murray). Do the deaths of Malcolm II and Duncan seven years apart consecrate Glamis to the Horned God -- or has the baptism in royal blood made the castle the "cracked tower" of the [Waste Land](#), womb of blighted fertility? The Merovingian Holy Blood runs through the veins of the Lairds of Glamis -- Sir John Lyon married Joanna Stuart in 1376 -- is the Monster of Glamis actually the product of a *Prieuré* genetic experiment? Are the "night hags" appearing over sleepers at Glamis actually foul succubi, spawning in the Castle's vortices? Perhaps the Lyon family takes its name from its feline and monstrous [manticore](#) heritage, which, crossbred with the ultraterrestrial seed of Glamis' specters and with the eldritch Merovingian bloodline, emerges as the vampiric Monster of Glamis -- and rightwise king of Britain.

Johnny Law

for *GURPS* and *Feng Shui*

by Jesse Lowe

Full Name: John Jiheng Law

Concept: Chinese-American chi-using gunslinging private investigator for a cinematic pulp adventure setting.

Quote: "If the gentle persuasion of a reasonable man fails, I find my little buddy is a pretty persuasive speaker on his own terms."

Description: An average-looking Chinese American male, about 25 years old, with brown eyes and black hair. Usually dressed in a cheap suit with a tan trench coat and fedora. Wears a small amulet with the Chinese character for peace on it below his shirt. Born February 17, 1911 in San Francisco.

Weapons: Carries a pair of Colt 1911s in shoulder holsters. Also has a 2-shot derringer up his left sleeve and a switchblade up his right.

Other equipment: spare ammunition for the Colts, half a dozen bullets for the derringer, wallet, some cash, some matches, a PI badge, notebook and pencil stub.

Background

Born of a mixed-race couple in San Francisco, Johnny has always been a bit of an outcast from both cultures. In his childhood, he found solace reading the Westerns that his Chinese mother, Liu Zhenxian, left around the house. Though only a passable student, he excelled at sports and found some acceptance at school on the baseball team. He still throws a mean fastball. This fairly mundane existence was cut short at age 13 when his father, Eric Law, was shot, an innocent bystander in a gang war between the Triads and the Mafia. Johnny and his mother went to live with her parents in Chinatown, where he began to learn the ancient wisdom of the East thanks to his grandfather, Liu Aoli. Aoli saw that Johnny had great potential chi, but could not control due to the emotional trauma of his father's death. A master of Wudong (p. MA106), he decided that his final work in this life would be to train his grandson to harness his chi and ascend beyond his demeaning Western origins.

Johnny, however, didn't like the idea of learning "Chinese mumbo-jumbo" (he feared it would make him even less acceptable to his white friends), and spent more and more time reading Westerns and going to cowboy movies. Aoli, no fool, noticed Johnny's preoccupation with the Old West. That summer, he presented Johnny with a brand new Colt 1911 pistol and began taking him to a local shooting range.

For the next eight years, Johnny learned to shoot like nobody else, advancing his education both mystic and secular, and picking up some Wudong on the way. Unfortunately, the money his family had been surviving on (Eric Law's savings) was slowly dwindling, and by his twenty-first year, it was painfully obvious that he would need to find gainful employment. His knack for detail and uncanny shooting ability had caught the eye of Albert Weisenberg, a respected private investigator who practiced at the same shooting range as Johnny and Aoli. When he heard that Johnny needed a job, Weisenberg was quick to offer him a junior partnership in his detective agency. Johnny's abilities complemented Weisenberg's knowledge of the streets and the criminal mind wonderfully.

Soon, the agency prospered and Johnny began to seriously learn the ropes of private investigation. He and Weisenberg became close friends, and Johnny even attended Weisenberg's grandson's bar mitzvah. Then they got involved in the Red Dagger caper. Hired by a strange little German man to find the Red Dagger (a weird Tibetan knife) in the San Francisco underworld, the two detectives found themselves in way over their heads. After a fire on May 31st, 1935,

with a bunch of Italian thugs, Weisenberg was dead and Johnny was in a coma. He woke in July to find that his grandfather had been taking care of the detective agency in his absence.

Now Johnny's trying to get over the loss of Weisenberg by plunging himself into his work, while at the same time keeping his mother safe and his grandfather out of trouble. It's a full plate of problems, but hey -- it's better than a pair of cement overshoes and an intimate acquaintance with the Golden Gate.

Adventure Seeds

High Weirdness/Secret Magic

The little German man was Hans Steiner, an occultist and rabid Aryan supremacist. He set Johnny and Weisenberg up, hoping to kill them just after they had secured the Red Dagger for him. Unfortunately, in the confusion, Steiner was wounded and lost the dagger. He assumes that Johnny has it, and is preparing a vast and deadly plot to take his revenge and finally obtain the Red Dagger (a Tibetan phurba imbued with the power of Shambhala, or simply a bad fake, depending on the GM's mood).

Steiner is doubly dangerous because he is very wealthy, has many friends in the occult, theosophist and especially ariosophist communities, and will eventually become a member of the SS Ahnenerbe, the occult branch of the SS. He is utterly ruthless and may have dark powers, gained from green-gloved mystics (see the Suppressed Transmiission It's Not Easy Being Green -- and Evil!) or through ancient Nordic rituals.

Kung Fu Action

The PCs are approached by a mysterious old man who offers them a sum of money, or, if they are inclined towards the martial arts, teaching, to ambush Johnny. They are given strict instructions in how, where and when to attack him -- a small laundry in the middle of Chinatown. They are to attack him one at a time, and to let no one interfere.

Assuming the PCs do ambush Johnny, or show up at the laundry in order to warn him, they and he are attacked mid-scene by hatchet wielding Triad assassins; Johnny recently busted a Triad operation and they're out for blood. Should the PCs appear to be losing to the Triad assassins, the old man will appear out of nowhere and join in. After the fight he will reveal that he is Liu Aoli, and had decided that it was time to test his grandson to see if he was fit for further training. He is mildly annoyed at the Triad's interference, but will give the PCs the agreed upon payment. Johnny is more than a little annoyed at his grandfather's trick, and reconciling the two may present some story opportunities. The PCs have also angered the Triads, of course, and the Triads have a long memory.

Other Genres and Times

Johnny can easily be adapted to any time period with guns and martial arts; he would probably work particularly well in the Old West and the 1850 juncture for *Feng Shui* campaigns.

GURPS Stats [250 pts.]

Attributes [115]:

ST 11 [10], **DX** 14 [45], **IQ** 13 [30], **HT** 13 [30]
Speed: 6.75, **Move:** 6, **Dodge:** 7, **Parry:** 10 (unarmed)

Advantages [130]:

Ally (Grandfather Liu Aoli, 250 points, appears on a 9 or less) [20], Ambidexterity [10], Combat Reflexes [15], Sharpshooter [45], Trained By A Master [40].

Disadvantages [-54]:

Dependent (Mother Liu Zhenxian, 25 points, appears on a 12 or less) [-24], Enemy (Hans Steiner, 150+, 6 or less) [-10], Impulsiveness [-10], Sense of Duty (Family) [-5], Social Stigma (half-breed, -1 on reaction rolls) [-5]

Quirks [-5]:

Always wears peace amulet, meditates over his pistols every evening, carries cigarettes but doesn't smoke, shaves only every other week (and it doesn't show...), refuses to wear white.

Skills [41]:

Accounting-11 [1], Acting-12 [1], Area Knowledge: San Francisco-15 [4], Cooking-13 [1], Detect Lies-12 [2], Driving: Automobile-13 [1], Fast-talk-14 [4], Guns/TL6: Pistol-19 [8], Guns/TL6: Shotgun-16 [1], Holdout-14 [4], Knife-14 [1], Law-11 [1], Games (Mah Jongg)-13 [1], Photography/TL6-13 [2], Research-12 [1], Shadowing-13 [2], Sports (Baseball)-13 [1], Stealth-14 [2], Streetwise-13 [2], Savoir-Faire-13 [1]

Languages [2]:

Cantonese-13 [0], English-13 [0], Mandarin-13 [2] (Cantonese and English are both his native languages)

Martial Arts (Wudong) [21]:

Skills:

Acrobatics-14 [4], Breath Control-12 [4], Judo-14 [4], Karate-14 [4], Karate Art-14 [4]

Maneuvers:

Arm Lock-15 [0.5], Back Kick-12 [1], Elbow Strike-13 [0.5], Hook Kick-13 [1], Jump Kick-12 [1], Kicking-13 [1], Knee Strike-15 [1], Spin Kick-13 [1]

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Info/Chinese Culture +3 [8]

Wealth level: Working Stiff

Pyramid Review

Pyramid Review: Way Out West

Way Out West

Published by [Warfrog](#)

Written by **Martin Wallace**



\$35

Whether the title indicates the Old West's distance or demeanor, *Way Out West* is a board game depicting the pioneer spirit in the Southwest. Three to five players compete to herd cattle and sow the seeds of new towns along the frontier. They can try to outmaneuver their opponents, but chances are good that sooner or later some disputes will be settled with a hail of lead.

The object is to score the most victory points at game's end. How many points you get depends on how well you set yourself up during the course of play. Cash is nice and it plays a part in awarding the victory points, but mostly it helps you build up a winning position during the game.

Each player starts the game with a stake of money and two tokens. Except for the first turn, when dice rolls determine player order, a system of bidding establishes who gets to go first. The first person to drop out of the bidding goes last, the next to drop out goes next to last, and so on.

Once the order is settled, the first player places his token on one of the action boxes on the board. These boxes determine what you'll do. You may want to build a building or set up transportation in the town, hire more cowboys, buy cattle, move units around the board or start a gunfight with a competitor. The trouble is, there are only so many boxes for each action, and once an action has been taken that turn others may not be able to do the same thing. This is what makes turn order so important.

Everyone plays his first token in this fashion and performs the corresponding action, and then the first player gets to play his second token. Again, everyone places a token in an unclaimed box and performs that action. The turn is then over, the tokens are cleared from the action boxes and bidding begins again. At the end of every third turn, players receive their income.

Some actions are free, but some have an associated cost just as bidding for turn order does. If you don't want to run low on cash, you'll have to invest in some moneymaking options.

The board has areas representing five towns of increasing size, and each town has corral boxes, building boxes, and a name box. The corral boxes allow you to place cattle, the building boxes are for buildings and transports, and the name box holds cowboys. You must have a cowboy in the town to place cattle there, and you have to start in the smallest town -- you can't build in the next largest town until the previous one is more than half full.

You want to be able to build in the bigger towns because that's where the points are to be had. The larger the town, the more expansion it can accommodate. The more built up a town is, the more points it scores at the end. You get points for whatever you contributed to constructing the town, and may get additional points if you control the town with the most counters.

A number of conventions of the Old West genre are present. You can build stores and make money off cattle, or put up a hotel and charge the cowboys. The bank earns extra cash for the owner until another player's cowboys decide to

rob it. Stagecoaches make profits when cowboys start moving around the board, and there's always the danger of the sheep farmer moving in and devaluing your herd. Just about any problem can be solved with judicious application of gunfights; get a posse of your guys together and take over the train or rustle some cattle.

The game lasts a while -- about 90 minutes to two hours -- but individual turns are fairly brisk, which keeps the action lively. The biggest problem is keeping track of all the pieces of the puzzle that figure into a win; there's a pretty complex web of interrelated factors, and a clear idea of where everything has to be can be a maddening exercise. The math alone can be a headache.

The rules are simple even if the dynamics aren't, though they aren't presented in the neatest outline. A few turns of play will be enough to memorize the majority of them. The board is a solid piece of work, and the graphics are clean and subdued. Similarly, the counters are large and mostly easy to read (some of the buildings and transport counters might make you squint), and the money is a series of round counters with different sizes for different denominations.

The quality of the components helps drive the price up, of course, but it's about on par with most of the recent crop and easily as playable. Walking an even line between economic acumen and western action, *Way Out West* rounds up a little flavor and a lot of fun.

--Andy Vetromile

Pyramid Review

In Your Face Again (for Feng Shui)

Published by [Atlas Games](#)

Written by Anthony Botz, Darrin Bright, Loki Carbis, Jim Crocker, David Eber, Mark Kinney, Alex Knapik, Tom McGrenery and Mike Mearls Illustrated by Toren Atkinson, Andrew Baker, William Bronson, Eric Hotz, Jim Pavalec, Steven Saunders, Grey Thornberry and David White



128 pages; \$19.95

Under the aegis of Atlas games, *Feng Shui*, the RPG of Hong Kong cinematic action, has been well supported with four good sourcebooks, but barring Robin D. Laws' *Four Bastards*, actual adventures have been a little thin on the ground. Now this has been rectified with an anthology of ten scenarios, entitled *In Your Face Again*.

This 128-page book is laid out in the standard *Feng Shui* style -- easy to read and littered with cheesy sub-titles, but it does suffer from the occasional typographical error. The standard of the interior art is a little variable, with the work of Toren Atkinson, Andrew Baker and David White standing out from the rest.

Seven of the ten scenarios are set in *Feng Shui*'s contemporary juncture, though as evidenced from this book, it has yet to take into account the handing over of Hong Kong to the Chinese government. One each of the remaining three is set in the 69 AD, 1850, and 2056 junctures. Several do make use of the *Golden Comeback* sourcebook, but referees looking to expand these adventures as part their own campaigns will find *Elevator to the Netherworld* equally as useful. At the beginning of each adventure, a short paragraph explains that scenario's premise, twist, and climax at a glance, before getting into the meat of the plot.

(SPOILER ALERT!)

In Your Face Again opens with Darrin Bright's "Fast Forward." This is a suitable as an introductory adventure for players new to the game or who have not yet learnt of the Secret War. A chance encounter and a mix up in videotapes they are returning to their local video rental library, causes the players to learn more than they should. As with every scenario, each fight location is accompanied by a detailed list of suggested events for that scene. "Blood & Sand" by Tom McGrenery is the second entry and takes the players back to the Rome of 69 AD in search of a new Chi site. Of course, what does one do in Rome but go to the races? And if a chariot team is short a rider, then who better than the players top leap aboard? The race is one of those great scenes that should get the blood racing for both players and GM alike, though the GM does need make sure that it is just as fun for those not in the race itself.

Preventing the Ascended from obtaining a powerful fu-based weapon is the reason for getting the players deep into the Netherworld in Anthony Botz's "Invincible Chi." Thankfully the Guiding Hand are along as allies, but then it all goes pear-shaped and climaxes on a speeding train hurtling through the Netherworld. This is followed by Mike Mearls' "Last Stand at Old Man Fong's," which also involves another powerful artefact. And if the players ever wanted to ride a speeding eighteen-wheeled truck into the Netherworld, then this is their chance! Both of these scenarios are more

suitied to experienced players.

Tom McGrenery's second contribution is another blast to the past, and gives the GM the opportunity to drag out every jungle cliché at their command. A treasure map leads the players deep into the Congo and darkest Africa of the 1850 juncture to The City of An-Makalur. This is a lot of fun as hungry natives, devious Belgians, and eventually crazy gorillas harass the players on their journey up the river Congo and into the jungle.

Also suitable for beginning players is "Fight Night" by David Eber, as the links in this adventure to the Secret War are rather slight. Set outside of Hong Kong in California, they are asked to locate a missing girl by her father. Her trail leads into the Los Angeles underground fight scene where they have to win her back in the arena. Being in the wrong place at the wrong time puts three factions upon the players' tail in Mark Kinney's Crossfire. This ultimately leads to a local Science Fiction convention, and once there who's to tell which of the weird things walking around there is actually real and deadly?

Loki Carbis also gives three factions, this time all after one Hong Kong resident in "Hong Kong Phonebook." Unfortunately three men in Hong Kong all share the same name and guess what? Each faction ends up with the wrong man! Even if they resolve this situation, the players only get a whiff of the figure behind this mix-up, and it would be great to see them come back in future adventures.

The most difficult adventure to run is Jim Crocker's "E Ticket Ride," which is set entirely in a newly opened Buro theme park in 2056 called Freedom Flags Park. This pokes a lot of fun at various theme parks and associated kids stuff, and has some great scenes and ideas, such as a rolling ferris wheel and a chi-powered zero gravity roller coaster ride. Unfortunately it will be difficult to get characters from outside the 2056 juncture involved, and this is its biggest weakness. Referees will also need a copy of the *Seed of the New Flesh* sourcebook to run this scenario. The last adventure is "Murderer's Row" by Alex Knapik, which saddles the players with a five-year-old girl at a baseball game. The kid is stranger than she looks -- aren't they always? -- and someone wants her dead. The fun and crux of this scenario is in dealing with the child and where she ends ups.

(END SPOILER ALERT)

Every one of ten scenarios in this book includes details of how to adapt it to be run with players who are part of factions other than the Dragons, as well as suggestions for further adventures. This increases the utility factor of *In Your Face Again* to just beyond the adventures in the book. The best of these have to be Tom McGrenery's pair of entries, "Blood & Sand" and "The City of An-Makalur," because they just that little bit different to the normal Feng Shui adventure and make good use of the possibilities that their respective junctures offer. But all of the adventures included are worth looking at. Every *Feng Shui* GM should have a copy of *In Your Face Again* on their bookshelf for when they need a scenario in a hurry. Atlas Games has put together an excellent anthology, and not only would it be great to see this followed up with another book that includes a few sequels, but also some sort of campaign book as well.

--*Matthew Pook*

Pyramid Pick

Forgotten Realms Campaign Setting (for Dungeons & Dragons)



Published by [Wizards of the Coast](#)

Written by Greenwood, Reynolds, Williams, and Heinsoo

320 color pages, \$39.95

It's impossible to cover every aspect of the new *Forgotten Realms* book in one review. For those who are unaware of what the *Forgotten Realms* setting is, it's high fantasy with powerful spellcasters and magnificent dragons. It's a vast land with knights, barbarians, horse archers, and just about any other type of fantasy archetype you can name.

For those who want gaming details, here are some of the highlights.

Player Races

Gray Dwarf: Duergar

Drow

Wild Elves (Slight modification to standard package)

Moon Elves (Standard)

Sun Elves (the old Gray Elves from 2nd Edition)

Wood Elves

Deep Gnomes: Svirfneblin

Rock Gnomes (Standard)

Half Elves

Half Orcs

Ghostwise Halflings

Strongheart Halflings

Lightfoot Halflings (Standard)

Planetouched:

Aasimar: Celestial

Genasi: Earth, Air, Fire, and Water

Tiefling: Fiendish

Each race has personality information, as well as what region they hail from, what racial abilities they possess, and what level adjustment they suffer for their power. The level adjustment factor is crucial for many of these new player races, like Drow who have a +2 level modifier, or Svirfneblin, who are so powerful they have a +3 level modifier. This level modifier counts towards their encounter level for purposes of how much experience points and money they are worth. The book has a page which explains in greater detail how to use these powerful characters, and this information would be useful for GMs who want to throw other races into the stew like Half Dragons or Cambions.

Feats

There are fifty one new feats in this book. Many of them fall under the category, regional feat. These feats represent skill sets, or abilities of those who follow a certain lifestyle. For example, the Twin Sword Style, made famous by Drizzt Do'Urden, can only be taken by those who hail from Sembia, Waterdeep, or are drow elves. There is a wide variety in the new feats, including some names from 2nd edition's various *Player's Option* books. For example, Signature Spell enables a spellcaster to select one spell, and treat it as a cleric would a healing spell. This lets the spellcaster swap out other spells to cast this spell when needed. Thus, if the mage selected lightning bolt, but had memorized dispel magic or fireball, he could swap out either spell to cast a lightning bolt. Another ability is Innate Spell, which allows the user to chose a spell and cast it like a natural ability. The cost is step though because they lose one spell slot higher than the spell. So a 3rd level spell with this ability would permanently reduce the number of 4th level spells the caster could memorize.

Prestige Classes

Arcane Devotee: Arcane spellusers who serve a deity.

Archmage: Mages who sacrifice spell slots to gain powerful spell augmentation.

Divine Champion: Combat specialist who serve a deity.

Divine Disciple: Augmented divine spellcasters.

Divine Seeker: Stealthy individuals who serve a deity.

Guild Thief: Name says it all.

Harper Scout: Bard like class.

Hathran (Witches of Rashemen): Class for individuals who have arcane and divine magic abilities.

Hierophant: Powerful divine class with access to powerful special abilities.

Purple Dragon Knight: The knighthood of Cormyr

Red Wizard: Wizards who specialize in a school of magic to a high degree with advanced abilities.

Runecaster: A divine spellcaster who makes runes with various abilities, triggers and powers.

Shadow Adept: Spellcaster who gains shadow based feats, spells, and powers.

Domains

All of the standard domains are listed, along with these new ones. Each domain has a list of deities which grant access to that domain, while the new domains have the granted power, and level dependent spells.

New Domains: Cavern, Charm, Craft, Darkness, Drow, Dwarf, Elf, Family, Fate, Gnome, Halfling, Hatred, Illusion, Mentalism, Metal, Moon, Nobility, Ocean, Orc, Planning, Portal, Renewal, Retribution, Rune, Scalykind, Slime, Spider, Storm, Suffering, Time, Trade, Tyranny, Undeath.

There are over thirty new spells, and the book converts many old favorite *Forgotten Realms* spells to 3rd Edition, including Aganazzar's Scorcher, Great Shout, Grimwald's Graymantle, Lesser Irconguard, Snilloc's Snowball Swarm, and Thunderlance. One of the best things about these new spells is that if you own the original 2nd edition spells, you can gain a better understanding of how to convert other spells to 3rd edition.

The book reintroduces some old mundane items, like bandoleers for carrying items and marbles for delaying foes. There are new special items like disappearing ink, infertility herbs, and powderhorns for carrying smokepowder. New mundane weapons include the blade boot, chakram, claw bracer (not unlike the mutant character Wolverine), cutlass, khopesh, maul, saber, and scourge.

The geography includes most locations and recent updates to them. For example, Anauroch now hosts the City of Shade, an ancient city of Neheril that has returned from the Plane of Shadows with a host of powerful spellcasters. Each section has the Capital, population, government, religions, imports, exports, and alignment. This breakdown information is followed by information on the region, life and society, major geographic features, important sites, regional history, plots and rumors, and an NPC. The NPCs range from famous individuals from novels and adventures (like Drizzt and Mirt) to new faces like Arrk (a troll fighter) and Sahbuti (a monk, sorcerer, and shadow adept). There are also several different maps of the land. One of them shows the various trade routes. Another shows the political boundaries.

Areas mentioned, but not covered in detail, include all the expansion areas like Kara-Tur, (Oriental Adventures), Maztica (Maya/Aztec Indian based), and Zakhara (Arabian Adventurers). Some of the old *Spelljammer* material is mentioned, like the Tears of Selune, but the whole setting is filed under "the Sea of Night".

The deities listing includes fifty six human based gods, ten from the Mulhorandi (Egyptian) gods, six gods from the drow, fourteen for the dwarves, twelve for the elves, eight for the gnomes, six for the halflings, six for the orcs.

Not all of the gods are given detailed descriptions though. Each breakdown includes name, alignment, domains, favored weapon, symbol, and portfolio. Each description includes name, status (greater, lesser, demi), symbol, alignment, portfolio, domains, favored weapon, description, history, relationships dogma. The description gives the reader information on what the god represents, the history, information about what the god has done or been involved with, the relationships, who the god is allied with, or battles against, the dogma, what the church preaches to its followers.

One of the most interesting things is the return of Bane, one of the gods killed during the Time of Troubles. The god Iyachtu Xvim is no more, as this was but a seed for Bane to be reborn into . . . but with a name like Iyachtu Xvim, you knew he wasn't going to last!

Perhaps the strangest part of the whole *Forgotten Realms* book is that the history of the Realms is towards the end of the book. A brief section is followed by a six page timeline.

After history, organizations are listed. Each organization includes name and background information, which includes goals, allies, and enemies. Some entries include a typical member with stats and possessions. This makes it much easier to insert a group of Fire Knives or members from the Cult of the Dragon against the party. Other organizations include the Emerald Enclave (a group of druids), the semi-secret group called the Harpers, the People of the Black Blood, worshippers of Malar, the Red Wizards of Thay, the Shades, the Netheril wizards who've returned from the plane of Shade, and others. A few organizations have popular figures with full stats, including Khelben "Blackstaff" Arunsun, Alustriel, and Manshoon.

The book includes two adventures: "The Color of Ambition," for 1st or 2nd level characters, and "Green Bones," for 16th level characters. The former pits the characters into the machinations of a Red Wizard, the latter against a powerful green dragon.

Also included are new monsters and more old favorites like the Death Tyrant, an Undead Beholder, the Dracolich, a lich template designed for dragons, and the Shade template, along with mundane animals, rothe, and kir-lanan gargoyles. Each follows the standard *Monster Manual* Layout. Most of the monsters have illustrations; only the mundane animals don't get illustrations, as there are six different types.

Also in this book you get a sneak peak at one of the books coming up next year: the *Epic Level Handbook*, a book designed for characters above 20th level. Some of the benefits of raising above 20th level are covered, and some only hinted at.

The book ends with a very thorough five-page index.

The map, which is glued to the book in two spots, did not come out in my case without pulling the blue material with it. The map is eight pages and feels very light and is very crowded. Many details from previous adventures are missing on the map. In addition, unlike an American Map where Alaska and Hawaii are included in a sidebar, there is no sidebar for several off-shore areas like the Isles of Evermeet. The maps' colors are muted in comparison to other *Realms* maps from previous editions.

The art is top notch. Todd Lockwood, Sam Wood, Matt Wilson Carlo Arellano, and Stephanie Pui-Mun Law all did a great job. Todd's work stands out the most in my mind, with several full color illustrations of some of the most famous characters in the Realms, defining them in ways that Larry Elmore's covers haven't been able to.

The book is laid out with the standard two columns in most places, with numerous sidebars, often at the bottom, giving the user extra information on subjects ranging from unique dragons, history, and dungeons. The book is printed on paper that looks faded like old parchment, while the sidebars are a darker yellow.

Now the books' organization is a whole different story. By placing so much of the Realms itself at the back, like the history, organizations, and gods, Wizards of the Coast seems to say, "Buy this book because of all the cool stuff you can throw in your own campaign, look the *Realms* over later." I'm sure many *FR* fans would have rather seen the *FR* information at the front of the book, and all the "candy" at the back of it. It's like putting the new monsters, magic items, and spells of an adventure at the front, and then putting the module after them.

After all is said and done, the question is, is the book worth the \$39.95 price tag? Even without playing in the *Forgotten Realms*, the casual reader will gain two adventurers, over fifty feats, over thirty new cleric domains, over ten new player races, over ten prestige classes, expanded selection for dwarf, drow, elf, gnome, and halfling clerics, and over thirty new spells. In this aspect, this book is not so much a campaign setting as a Core Game Rule Expansion . . . so the answer is "yes."

If you happen to enjoy the *Forgotten Realms* and want to see what Wizards of the Coast has done with it, then prepare for the standard. The setting continues to labor under the novels. Setting-wide changes, such as the inclusion of Shades and the return of the Nethril wizards, all come from a single novel. The greatest strength of the setting has always been Greenwood's love of magic. His creations, for better or worse, have given the *Forgotten Realms* a distinct flavor. The greatest weakness is probably that the Realms are tied to other projects, like the upcoming *Assault of Myth Drannor*; for better or worse, these things will effect the campaign setting, requiring the GM to either ignore, add, or modify a bought setting. Having said that, though, if you're a *FR* fan and have enjoyed the changes made in the past based on novels and games, then this book is for you.

--Joe G. Kushner

Dork Tower!



Dork Tower!



Murphy's Rules



by John Kovalic

Murphy's Rules



Murphy's Rules



Son of Odds 'n' Ends

This week I'm just going to deal with fiddly bits. Sorry; I need to, every so often.

* * *

Okay; I've received a few emails from folks asking about the coin puzzle from [last week's column](#). Now, keep in mind that this puzzle was specifically held aloft as an example of what *not* to do . . . much like the [Torg](#) story. Yet I've got folks curious about wanting to know the puzzle's solution so they can inflict it on their players.

Okay; 'cause I love you all, I'll tell you how to do the coin puzzle. BUT DON'T DO IT! Resist the temptation! Or, if you must, then don't make the adventure depend on it; make it for an optional treasure, reward, or the like.

Okay; the puzzle's premise is: You have 12 coins. All 12 look identical. Eleven of the coins *are* identical, while the twelfth merely looks identical, but it weighs differently (either more or less).

You have an old-fashioned scale, where you weigh objects on one side against objects on the other. Thus you don't know actual weights; instead, with any two objects (or groups of objects) weighed you only know if one side is heavier or lighter than the other, or if the two sides are equal.

The question is, how can you determine which coin is different in only three weighings?

Okay; here's how you do it, in probably the easiest way to remember in case you're trapped on Game Show Island and they make you do this puzzle.

Label the 12 coins with the twelve letters in the phrase "FAKE MIND CLOT." Then use the mnemonic phrase "Ma, do like me to find fake coin." to determine the order you are supposed to weigh the coins; each group of eight letters indicates the four coins to be weighted on the left side and the four to be weighed on the right. (Thanks to Steven Howard for revealing this method.)

Thus for your first weighing you would have coins "MADO" on the left side, and "LIKE" on the right. On the second weighing you would have "METO" on the left and "FIND" on the right. Third weighing: "FAKE" left, "COIN" right.

Now, once you've used your three weighings, you should be able to use logic to determine which one is the odd one out. Let's say coin "F" is heavier than the others. Then the result of the weighings will be first = equal, second = right heavy, third = left heavy.

Since they were equal in the first weighing, then coins "MADOLIKE" all weigh the same; thus they can't be the odd coin. Marking those coins as lowercase (since they can't be the odd coin), we're left with:

meTo is lighter than **FiNd**.
Fake is heavier than **CoIN**.

Now, either the odd coin is heavier (in which case it's in both the **FiNd** pile and the **Fake** pile), or the odd coin is lighter (in which case it's in both the **meTo** pile and the **CoIN** pile).

The coin can't be lighter, since there's no coin we haven't eliminated that's in both the **meTo** pile and the **CoIN** pile. Therefore, the coin must be heavier; the only coin that we haven't eliminated that's in both the **FiNd** pile and the **Fake** pile is F. Therefore our coin is F, and it's heavier.

It is left to the reader to work out the other 24 possibilities (11 more options for the coin to be heavier, 12 options for the coin to be lighter, and 1 option where all 12 coins, are, in fact, identical . . . and the GM gets his kneecaps clubbed by angry players). But keep in mind that, in all scenarios, one of the three weighings will be identical, meaning that at least 8 coins will be eliminated right off the bat. Also keep in mind that I *don't recommend using this puzzle!* It's pretty

straight-forward if you know what you're doing, but it can be a pain to figure out if you're not.

* * *

Okay; for the four folks still reading the column, umm . . . hi.

If you're looking for *good* puzzles, I honestly can't recommend any better starting point than the **rec.puzzles** archive. There are hundreds of classic puzzles here, with solutions. And many (if not most) can be easily modified to a variety of situations, from fantasy dungeons to the tests of omnipotent aliens. (As an aside, the coin puzzle is under the Logic section.)

That archive is at <http://ladybug.xs4all.nl/arlet/puzzles/>

If the Logic section interests you (in particular, those labeled "smullyan"), then I can heartily recommend other writings by Raymond Smullyan. A Professor of Philosophy, Dr. Smullyan has written many books about abstract logic which are amazingly approachable. He has a wonderful way of weaving stories around expanding logic puzzles. For example, one chapter of his book *What is the Name of This Book?* details a woman named Portia (based on the *Merchant of Venice's* Portia) who is trying to choose a worthy husband based on intelligence; if he can correctly choose the casket that contains her portrait (using logic, of course), she will marry him.

The first puzzle in that series has three caskets:

- **Gold:** The portrait is in this casket.
- **Silver:** The portrait is not in this casket.
- **Lead:** The portrait is not in the gold casket.

The suitor is told that, of the three statements, at most one is true. So . . . which casket contains the portrait? The puzzles get progressively harder . . . and eventually move through several generations of Portias. (Of course, the clever GM is realizing the "portrait" could just as easily be the "Artifact of Power" or "Spock's Brain" . . . though in the latter case it's questionable if adventurers would want to find it.)

Another chapter of the same book details a philosopher going on an extended quest to determine the answer to the question: "Why is there something instead of nothing?" The answer is surprising.

In addition to that book, I personally own and can recommend Smullyan's *The Lady or the Tiger?*, *The Riddle of Scheherazade*, and *Satan, Cantor, and Infinity*. (He also has a couple of books of chess puzzles, as well as numerous college textbooks, so so be careful about buying a book sight unseen.)

* * *

Okay; now let me talk about submissions a bit.

- For those of you using AOL, please note that there seems to be some sort of bug with their web mail client that prevents imbedded text files longer than 18K (about 2,500 words) from being submitted. The first 18K will be sent, but the rest will be lost to the aether. The ways around this seem to be to use AOL's standard mail client, to send the file in multiple pieces, or to send your file as an attachment. (Yes, I *really* don't like to receive files as attachments . . . but I'll endure if I need to. Even so, I *strongly* recommend sending it as a straight text file. I'm not at the point where I'll automatically delete, say, a Word document I receive, but it will only take one bad incident to make me change my mind.)
- I'm currently slogging through the slushpile in my spare moments (hah!). For those of you who keep track of these things, I have about 50 pieces in the slushpile currently (though that's mostly because I've received about 30 in the past couple weeks). I also have about 60 pieces that I've made up my mind on, but I need to write acceptance/rejection letters.
- For would-be review writers, please note that, with *very* few exceptions, reviews need to be at least 750-1,000 words. More is generally okay; less generally isn't. Even the most seemingly straightforward product is difficult

to do justice in less than 750 words; if it's a simple game, give an example of what makes it different. Maybe give an example of play. If it's a short book, do more than give an itemized list of what's included; try to put it in some context with the rest of the game line. And so on.

Well, I've rambled enough for this week. As ever, please feel free to drop me a line via [e-mail](#), the [chat rooms](#), or the [discussion boards](#).

--*Steven Marsh*

* * *

*Last week's answer: **Button Men**, from Cheapass Games. (I think it's also on the **Brawl** deck too . . . but I'm not sure.)*

(One star) "Your victim must share living quarters with a cat -- preferably a very friendly, cuddly one. Borrow that cat, by fair means or foul, and paint its claws with colored nail polish. Then return the cat. Its nails are now covered with a virulent poison!"



by Phil Masters

(Note: The *Magnus* is mentioned, very briefly, in the *Mage: the Sorcerers Crusade* supplement, *Castles and Covenants*. This article expands and extends the information given there.)

Introduction

This article describes a plot feature originally created for White Wolf's *Mage: the Sorcerers Crusade*, and hence something that could exist in the fifteenth-century history of any *World of Darkness* game, especially the modern-day *Mage: the Ascension*. (A couple of the scenario suggestions given enable it to play a part in the latter game.) It -- or a similar vessel -- could also be used in other fantasy settings, or as part of the history (c. 1450 AD) of many modern-day supernatural/conspiracy games; it can fit into any game-world with mysterious, icy polar regions, which permits the existence of a small exploration craft whose crew use minor magics and high levels of practical skill. (In *Mage: the Sorcerers Crusade*, the two can be almost the same thing.) Notes on adapting this material to other games are given where appropriate. The geography assumed is that of our own world; GMs of other fantasy games should substitute place-names from their own worlds.

The *Magnus* (properly, the *Saint Magnus*, but people are forever forgetting) is a small, single-masted sailing vessel, which may be found in the harbors of Orkney, Shetland, Iceland, or Norway. The people of those parts know it for a wandering trader, and accept it as such, although the wiser among them consider its captain mad for sailing in all weathers in such a small craft, with a crew of but a dozen.

In fact, Olave Kethrisson is an Enlightened Void Seeker, as are three of his crew; their diverse Arts ensure that their craft is far more robust than it appears. The other eight of those aboard are junior "brethren"; all share the Void Seeker dream of questing and courage.

The *Magnus*'s trade activities are a sideline -- a smokescreen over its true mission. This is a continuing dream that has kept the vessel and its crew together for a long time. Kethrisson takes the ship further north every summer, deeper into the realms of ice. He is a peculiar sort of scholar, and he believes that ancient texts that speak of "Ultima Thule" refer to something other than the lands he already knows; he has also heard wild whispers -- of cave- mouth gates leading to whole new worlds, of the true origins of the Northern Lights, of lands beyond the ice . . .

The Vessel and its Crew

The *Magnus* was built in a Danish shipyard to the order of Olave Kethrisson's family trading-house, under the supervision of a number of highly talented craftsmen (High Artisans and Void Seekers in *Mage: the Sorcerers Crusade*); as a result, it embodies the most advanced construction techniques of the age. It is a rugged, clinker-built vessel, square-rigged, and rounded, high at prow and stern; its design is actually sophisticated and subtle, and it can raise a lateen sail in addition to the main square-sail. It is kept in excellent condition by the crew's special

A Note on "Magick"

The "Enlightened Arts" used by the *Magnus*'s crew are

talents.

The crewmen were recruited by passing word around places where the bravest and most talented explorers congregate (Void Seeker lodges), though Kethrisson puts some effort into maintaining a façade of normality. Mostly, they signed up unprompted, because they shared the captain's obsessive interest in exploration, although Kethrisson went out of his way to persuade one or two of them to join because they possessed specific skills the ship needs.

Olave Kethrisson

The captain of the *Magnus* is a well-built middle-aged man of Norwegian descent, as suggested by his red hair and beard. (The latter is now just turning to gray.) With the look and surface manners of a stolid trader, he is easy to underestimate in some ways. In fact, he is at heart a scholar above all.

He was born into a family of traders, with enough spare wealth to indulge this clever younger son; for a while, it was assumed that he would go into the church, and he spent some time at various universities and colleges around the northern coasts of Europe. But then he returned home with ambitious suggestions for increasing the family's fur trade -- and also with some knowledge of systems of navigation, that obliged his family to admit that his education was some use. Nor was he too proud to bend his back, serving on a number of trade vessels to gain the additional knowledge he needed before he acquired a ship of his own.

Today, Kethrisson and the *Magnus* have relatively little contact with the family trading-house, although relations remain friendly when they do meet; his two surviving brothers, both now comfortable stay-at-home merchants, regard him as a little touched, too much the dreamer to really make good. In *Mage: the Sorcerers Crusade*, treat him as having a little knowledge of most of the Spheres, with a special interest in Connection; in other games, he should be given above-average perceptions and a number of divination and detection spells.

Lars Palme

The first mate aboard the *Magnus* is Lars Palme, another experienced Norwegian sailor who was recruited into the secret brotherhood of Explorators when an observant member of the group recognized that he was quite *implausibly* good at keeping ships intact and afloat. In *Mage*, his affinity is with Matter, working through plain tools and good materials, and his secondary arts of Prime and Entropy mostly serve to enhance this; in other games, he should be given extremely high levels of skill with various crafts, and some simple spells of mending. In a real sense, the entire ship sometimes becomes his casting tool or "focus." Although he is a peaceful man, he is dangerous in a fight, because the blades he wield (usually axes) cut so well.

Palme is sometimes visited by a guiding spirit -- a "Daemon" in *Mage* terms -- when no-one else is around. It takes the form of a misty vision of a man with the face of his dead father, a master-shipwright. Palme finds this unnerving -- his father, while not cruel, was a cold, critical man -- but the vision always advises him well.

Colin Macinvar

Tall, blond-haired, handsome, and oddly clean-shaven, the Scotsman Colin Macinvar is the *Magnus'* healer and

deeply pragmatic, with only a rather loose underpinning of theory; from the high-magical point of view, even the more blatantly supernatural part of their work is mere hedge-magic, and academic philosopher-scientists would view them with some disdain. They combine smatterings of academic lore with old sailors' charms, survival tricks learned from Lapps and others, and vast practical expertise in the building and maintenance of ships. On the other hand, their study of shipbuilding and sail-handling is deeply logical and rational, verging on the prosaic, save in its perfection. In *Mage: the Sorcerers Crusade* terms, their Arts are so subtle that they can pass for coincidences or "good workmanship" (which at least ensures that their activities are usually casual). They are unlikely to use their Arts in combat (save for Countermagick), preferring to depend on good steel if they must fight.

The other aspect to the Void Seekers' Arts is mystical and ritualistic; they attach *names* to what they discover, and thus bind the world to their vision. The crew of the *Magnus* mostly leave this great, secret, serious work to senior Guildsmen when they return from their journeys, although Kethrisson has some grasp of the forms.

chirurgian (an expert in the Sphere of Life in *Mage*). He is important to the ship; his arts enable the crew to remain alive and effective (if not actually comfortable) for days at a time in arctic conditions. He achieves this through a vast range of knowledge and methods; he has studied with academics, but he also spends as much time as he can with any arctic-dwelling tribes he meets, learning what he can of their secrets and tricks. He is certainly not too proud to use anything that works.

Beyond a surface charm and a clear taste for scholarship, Macinvar's nature is actually something of a mystery to his shipmates. One or two of them recognize that he is as adept with the mind as with the medicine of the body, using special techniques to learn enough of any language he needs -- and sometimes, subtle tricks of rhetoric to extract secrets from others. In truth, he is a collector of secrets, a nigh-perfect Explorer in everything save his lack of deep passion.

Michael Galglass

The fourth Enlightened crewman aboard the *Magnus* is an Irish weather-worker (a specialist in Forces Art in *Mage*; give him some basic weather-related magics in other games). Michael Galglass is short and red-haired, and dresses in an archaic but colorful style, wearing a number of amulets and lenses, especially when at sea.

His techniques are very *traditional* in style, involve charms and chants to control the weather in the ship's immediate vicinity and predict its behavior in the near future. (In *Mage*, Galglass has some secondary talent with the Sphere of Time.) Thus, they are reasonably subtle -- except when used at their limits, as such forces are not supposed to be commanded by mortals. Galglass himself is quiet when not working; secretly, he has a growing taste for power for its own sake, and seeks to stretch and test his own capabilities in the extreme conditions of the arctic realms.

Other Crew

The eight Brethren aboard the *Magnus* are all pretty competent, of course, and are perhaps a little more staid and quiet than most Explorators; this vessel does not plunge recklessly into storms or open ocean, or confront wild tribesmen, but probes, season after season, looking for channels through the ice and safe passage around bleak, uninhabited coasts. Most of them were recruited in the Scandinavian lands, and all must know Norwegian, in which the ship's operations are conducted.

Unbeknownst to the rest of the crew, and to a large extent to himself, one of them, Harald Kveldulf, has the "Fae Blood" merit (see *Crusade Lore*; basically, he is related to the faerie folk, who can sense this and may respond to him kindly). He has had occasional brushes with his cousins, but put them down to chance so far. (His name actually implies *werewolf* associations -- something that hints, however misleadingly, at oddities in his family.) He has something of a fae's taste for the wondrous, but that is hardly unusual in his present company.

Incidentally, the crew of the *Magnus* are all male. Although the adventurous Explorators have less bias with regard to women's abilities than most folk of the age, when one goes looking for tough, experienced sailors, it is hard to avoid finding mostly men, and in any case, on a ship this small, there is little scope for even minimal privacy; taking women aboard would cause all manner of problems. (And it is impossible to keep secrets on the *Magnus*.)

Polar Exploration

The crew of the *Magnus* are, by the standards of their age, insanely brave; mundane explorers have not ventured into the arctic regions yet, and it takes a great deal of ingenuity (and reality-twisting willpower) to keep a vessel built seemingly to fifteenth-century standards intact amidst the ice, and its crew alive. Even the hardy folk of the Scandinavian kingdoms regard the very far north as infinitely hostile. They know of people on their northern borders; the Lapps, a pagan race with a name for witchcraft. Hints say that, beyond the territory of these strange reindeer-herders, there is an ocean of ice -- a mystery best left alone.

Actually, it is possible that Viking seafarers explored some of this region centuries since; even so, the *Magnus* is

effectively blazing trails. But the crew's efforts will bear fruit; by the end of the fifteenth century, Russian seafarers will be quietly sailing around the northern extremity of Norway to do business, and in the sixteenth, the English and then the Dutch will scout out routes to the fur trade of Siberia, and dream of establishing a permanent "Northeast Passage" to the wealth of Asia. (Needless to say, the Void Seekers will be thoroughly entangled with all this.)

Further south, only scholars give any thought at all to the polar regions, and even they view them as inherently enigmatic. A few ancient texts speak of months-long days and nights -- something any intelligent philosopher-astronomer or geographer can see as logical -- but not much more. The question of celestial mechanics also arises; all sensible scholars know that the world is a spinning globe, and though few are so old-fashioned as to believe that there must be a physical axle involved, some do. Certainly, the question of the physical nature of a region of extreme cold around which the world revolves represents something of an enigma. Philosophy sometimes seems merely to add to the questions; for example, no one is sure how a magnetic compass *should* behave in the far north, but there is evidence that such devices act rather oddly.

In other words, the far north is a realm of mystery, of precisely the sort which the Explorators are sworn to resolve and map. What they do not yet quite recognize is that, where there are so few people of any sort, let alone representatives of the competing philosophical schools of more civilized lands, reality is unfixed, and thus malleable. The heroic efforts of the Void Seekers may actually serve to establish the nature of this true axis of the world -- and the *Magnus* is the very vanguard of this effort.

Theories and the Hollow Earth

To add to the significance of this project, the polar regions may, in some frames of reference, grant access to something more. Some philosophers observe that the universe is, according to many popular theories, a set of concentric shells, with the Earth at the center. Furthermore, observation shows that all living things tend to have internal cavities and complexities, rather than being homogenous throughout -- and is not the Earth a living thing, in many ways? Who is to say that the Earth is the *innermost* of the spheres?

The idea of the Hollow Earth will survive into the twentieth century. (In *Mage*, this is despite heroic efforts by the Order of Reason to show how ridiculous it is; the Sons of the Ether will struggle to preserve it even once their former colleagues have closed the last entrances.) But in the era of the *Magnus's* voyages, it is the Explorators who are just beginning to discover those entrances -- and the poles are where most will be found.

There are minuscule hints in old texts of what they will discover; for example, in the thirteenth century, Bartholomew of England wrote that, at the north pole, there was a great black rock, "33 leagues" in circumference, beneath which the ocean flowed through four channels into an immense whirlpool. If Bartholomew was anything more than a fantasist, he would have to have been a true visionary to learn of such a thing; Kethrisson for one has doubts about this information (and later research, by any faction, will find no rock). Still, Bartholomew's ideas will endure for some time; the seventeenth-century Jesuit philosopher, Athanasius Kircher (in *Mage* history, probably a sleeper pawn used by the Order of Reason to introduce their ideas into the consensus), will theorize that the waters of the earth flow into just such a vortex, pass through the fiery interior of the Earth, and emerge through an inverse vortex at the South Pole. For now, the *Magnus* proceeds carefully, watching lest the northward currents grow too strong, and the ship should become unable to turn back.

Given that these vague current philosophical ideas are all that is "known" about the very far north, they may actually be enough to *shape reality* in those parts; there may indeed be vortices, strange geology, or extraordinary cave-systems. (See *The Book of Worlds* for information on the state of the Hollow Earth in the twentieth century of *Mage: the Ascension*. Modern mages believe that the so-called "Hollow Earth" is in fact the Shade Realm of Matter. However, not only is Awakened cosmology a lot less developed in 1450, with no strong conceptions of Shade Realms, but humans generally have a very different concept of the structure of the universe -- which may well influence what explorers may discover.)

It's possible that gates in the Arctic (vast "Crays," stable and easily traversed in this area without strong belief reinforcing reality) lead to realms similar or identical to those detailed *The Book of Worlds*; storytellers can use this as

an excuse to startle swashbuckling Void Seekers with the dinosaur-ridden jungles of Biotopia, or confront Explorators with enigmatic philosopher-monks of vast Awakened power (remember that the Deros do not yet exist); but it's also possible that these gates might take the form of passages leading sharply down, and exuding a warm, sulfurous stench .

..

For *many* sleepers still believe that Hell lies, literally, beneath their feet, which might shape reality so as to make ventures into the depths of the Earth terribly dangerous and hubristic. In the terms of the period, what the crew of *Magnus* finds may lead them, very literally, to the Devil.

Other Views of the *Magnus* in the Sorcerers Crusade

The Order of Reason

Those other Void Seekers, and their allies among the Celestial Masters, who know of the *Magnus* have great respect for its work, and its crew. The only occasional small joke comes from those of the Convention who share too much of the High Guild view of things; most travel and exploration is conducted with a view to trade, but what profit is there to find among the northern pagans, let alone the polar ice? (There is a serious answer to this question, actually; arctic furs have significant value.)

Once or twice, when Kethrisson has reported his findings to great meetings of the Order of Reason, some among the Gabrielites have listened hard, and spoken to him both of those pagans and of his other ideas. Their dream of "One World, One Faith, One God" demands that they learn what races dwell in even the furthest corners of the Earth, that one day, the Word may be carried there. As to supposed gates into strange underworlds -- well, that sounds unlikely to them, but it is not their place to question the intricacies of God's Creation, and perhaps a few rather hubristic spirits dream of Crusades into the very mouth of Hell.

Mostly, however, the activities of the *Magnus* are of little interest to the great councils of the Order, and its crew, spending much of their time out of contact with most of humanity, are not much involved in politics. The Ksirafai have never bothered placing a spy in its crew; a dozen Explorators, venturing beyond human company, are unlikely to represent a danger to the ideals of Reason. They record a few comments on this subject, sometimes check that port-gossip does not run out of hand when the *Magnus* has passed through, and leave it be.

The Traditions and the Disparate

The *Magnus* mostly avoids the attentions of other folk of any kind, but a few northerly will-workers have noted its passing, sensed the subtle arts it embodies, and maybe wondered a little. There are some highly capable shamans among the tribes of the far North (both the Lapps and the Inuit of Greenland, where the *Magnus* has occasionally traveled); of these, some are associated with the Dreamspeakers (themselves a loosely-organized Tradition at best), while others are distinctly Disparate.

In fact, Colin Macinvar is slightly acquainted with a few of these folk, who do not -- yet -- see him or his friends as any sort of danger. One risk to the *Magnus* is that visitors or messages from the Council of the Nine could somehow rouse the local tribes against them, but this is probably unlikely. Twelve men, not wielding much serious magick, seem like threats to no-one, and sometimes they bring interesting trade goods.

Other Supernaturals

No vampires or shape-shifters seem yet to have noted the activities of the *Magnus*, or if they have, they have given it little thought. It's not encroaching on anyone's territory; even the werewolves do not, at this time, worry about a few weak humans wandering into areas of such completely lifeless wilderness. As usual, the introverted preoccupations of the various groups prevent them from recognizing the long-term consequences of the Order of Reason's activities. Like the sleepers who see the ship sailing past, they shrug and dismiss its crew as a little crazy -- even if they smell magick on it.

Thanks to Harald Kveldulf's associations, a few fae (who pay more attention to him than he does to them) have actually taken note of the *Magnus*. Although they do not generally approach it closely -- the caution of its methodical crew strikes them as terribly Banal -- they suspect that it may one day return with tales of true wonders, making it, at least potentially, a source of Glamour.

Scenario Seeds

Help Needed

For some characters at least, the easiest way to become involved with the *Magnus* is to find its crew asking for assistance (probably with the backing of higher-ranking philosopher-scientists). This could be for all manner of reasons; for example, super-competent artificers might assist in reinforcing the ship, to make it capable of breaking through some barrier of ice, or inventors might be asked to transport an ornithopter or a small balloon northwards in its hold, for use in reconnoitering some mysterious area from the air.

Of course, the mysteries might run deeper than expected; using H.P. Lovecraft's *At the Mountains of Madness* as a model would be excessive, and wouldn't really fit in *Mage: the Sorcerers Crusade*, but the *Magnus* might find some outpost of ancient human sorcery, perhaps left over from the height of Hermetic influence in the Middle Ages, or even from earlier eras of Egyptian magickal experimentation, or a construct of refugees from the old Himalayan Wars (perhaps tying up with later Sons of the Ether stories of Agharta).

The simplest and most straightforwardly dramatic find requiring aid for the crew might be a region where a few stout warriors are needed. Whether this is a matter of facing giant lizards in Biotopia with pistol and rapier, or actually descending into the upper borderlands of Hell with flaming sword and cross in hand, is up to the storyteller.

Beware of the Future!

Alternatively, members of the Traditions (or other factions in other games) might be sent on a mission to act **against** the *Magnus*. This could involve spreading the word among the Lapps or Inuit that these visitors may be a threat -- probably hard work when the tribes are just as likely to be suspicious of other visitors, and the *Magnus* at least brings trade -- or it could be a more specific matter of aiding some tribe in a fight against, say, violent missionaries who have traveled aboard the ship. (Of course, this begs the question of why the missionaries are over-reaching themselves so; what do they know that's special about this specific tribe?)

In either case, the opponents would have to find their own solution to the problem of survival in the hostile environment of the extreme north, conversing with remote tribes who speak no recognizable language, and so on.

Skyrigger on Ice

(Gamers who insist on thinking in cinematic terms should look on this one as *Ice Station Zebra* and *The X-Files* meet *Call of Cthulhu* in the 15th Century. And maybe *Smilla's Feeling for Snow* is in here somewhere too.)

In *Mage: the Sorcerers Crusade*, one faction of the Enlightened ventures even further than the Void Seekers; the Skyriggers of the Celestial Masters. Other games have their own space-faring ships. After their expeditions, of course, the flying vessels must return to Earth. But what if one such, driven far off course by some wild mischance, were to crash far to the north?

Assuming that enough of its fate was somehow divined by astrology (though how can astrology determine anything involving the celestial spheres themselves?), direct observation by some great telescope, or other means, word would be swiftly passed (across the Viasilicos network from Portus Crucis or the White Tower, in *Mage*); the sky-ship must be found, its crew succored if they live, its secrets (and the cause of the wreck) recovered if possible -- and if all else fails, all trace of it may have to be destroyed. The *Magnus* would be the best available transport (assuming that no

other sky- ships were available, or that none such were considered reliable in arctic conditions); its crew could be reinforced by the more varied skills of some other characters.

Alternatively, if some other organized or semi-organized faction were somehow to sight or learn of the fallen vessel, might this not be a fine chance to learn something of the these secretive sky- travelers and their craft? Of course, the problems of mustering and conducting an expedition across the tundra and ice would be followed by a confrontation with the crew of the *Magnus*, reinforced by allied soldiers.

And then there's the question of what might be found aboard the wreck -- and what might have caused the accident. A violent face-off between Void Seekers and Artificers on one side and Hermetics and Dreamspeakers on the other might be interrupted by *something* from beyond the fixed stars . . .

Redrawing the Maps

In a modern-day *Mage* game, records of the activities of the *Magnus* represent something of an issue for the Technocracy. On the one hand, the ship and its crew laid the groundwork for the Void Engineer's eventual consolidation of reality in the far north, and of all the conventions, the successors to the Void Seekers and Celestial Masters are the most prone to sentiment; their specialist historians know of this story, and regard Kethrisson and his men as heroes. On the other, this particular region took a fair amount of stabilizing, and not all of the data returned by the *Magnus* was incorporated into the current Consensus.

Thus, the Technocracy have a mixed committee of Void Engineer cartographers and historians from the Ivory Tower Methodology of the New World Order assigned part-time to tracking discoveries and research into old maps. Their job is to analyze anything that turns up, and modify or suppress it as necessary before it enters public circulation. Mostly, in fact, any such discoveries are allowed to go out unmodified; people expect old maps to be "inaccurate," and anything that suggests real strangeness can be written off as "doodling in the margins," period fantasy, or just a harmless mystery that will keep a few postgraduates distracted from anything more serious. Occasionally, however, anything up to a full team of Men in Black may have to go in, correct the misleading information, and even engage in a little mild mental processing on some sleeper researcher.

Tangling with this committee and its minions could be an interesting adventure for members of the Traditions, while working for it could make for an interesting change of pace in a Technocracy game. Characters with academic or antiquarian connections (such as many Hermetics) would be the most likely to note the mirrorshade- wearing visitors "from the funding department" who have just dropped into the library . . .

A Relic of the Rise

Another present-day option; Norwegian, Finnish, or Russian archaeologists working beyond the Arctic Circle report a striking find that makes the inside pages of a few newspapers; the remains of a sea-going vessel, apparently from the mid-fifteenth century, well beyond what was previously thought to be the limits of European sea- going travel in that era.

That in itself might seem like nothing more than a curiosity, although enough alarm bells would probably go off in certain quarters that a research team would be assigned to investigate. Getting members of *Mage*'s Traditions involved, save by blatant coincidence, would be a little harder (though mages are often *prone* to blatant coincidence); aside from having them happen to know some sleeper researcher involved, or learning through deep- cover spies within the Technocracy, or a Virtual Adept hack into a Technocracy comms system, they might recognize some obscure symbolism in one of the finds shown on a TV report, or be alerted by a spirit posted at the site by a Dreamspeaker, five hundred years ago.

On the site, any supernatural factions present should probably be careful, and even if they spot each other, should refrain from open conflict; there are a number of intelligent mundanes around the place, and there may well be TV crews. (Some TV crews include agents of the New World Order, but most don't.) And to begin with, there seem to be no specific reasons for conflict right here; the forces of Order will be aiming to have the find largely forgotten, filed

away as a minor academic curiosity, while more anarchic factions can't hope to profit much from it, aside from reintroducing a tiny amount more strangeness and ambiguity into the world.

But the storyteller can then set to work to make matters more interesting. Why did the *Magnus* come to grief here? In *Mage* terms, could this spot be magickally special -- perhaps a former entrance to the Hollow Earth, and still a functional Node? If so, the Traditions, and especially the Sons of the Ether, will be keen to know about it, although it will be hard to prevent the Technocracy from sanitizing it. If the Gauntlet is indeed thin here, *something* might break through, attracted by the unprecedented number of bodies or minds in the vicinity (and perhaps encouraged by Marauders who have also learned of the find); Traditions and Technocracy could be forced into temporary alliance. Or there might be still-functioning magickal artifacts among the remains, or a log- book recording other sites of potential interest anywhere from Greenland to northern Russia.

And for a really strange story, suppose that, when the ship was wrecked, Colin Macinvar endeavored to save the surviving crew any way he could -- employing Life and Entropy Arts in a very vain, inspired manner to place them literally on ice, preserving them against the hope of future rescue. Now, the supernatural visitors to the site can recognize that the "ice mummies" that the archaeologists turn up are more than dead bodies . . .

For the crew of the *Magnus*, awakening after half a millennium would be quite a shock; for everyone else, it would lead to complications. The event would have to be kept secret somehow, and the crew smuggled away; much as *Mage* Traditions might love to trumpet this strangeness, the added risk of Paradox backlash would be too much. Some technocrats would probably wish that the crew had stayed dead, but sentiment aside, the opportunities for Void Engineers to study the long-term effects of cryogenic suspension, and for Enlightened historians to learn, would be too good to miss. Mages, too, could learn from these people -- and it's by no means certain that they couldn't persuade the *Magnus*'s crew to join them rather than the likes of the Technocracy; after all, the ideals of the Technocratic Union are very different from those of the Order of Reason. This could be quite a propaganda coup of sorts -- and then, there are the story possibilities arising from their knowledge . . .

Bibliographical Note

As usual, anyone wishing to disentangle the historical background from the fantasy in this article should start with such standard sources as the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Many of the more bizarre details came from *Arktos: the Polar Myth in Science, Symbolism, and Nazi Survival*, by Joscelyn Godwin. Thanks to Ken Hite for pointing me towards much of the peculiar history of arctic myth-making.

Unexploded Cow

Published by [Cheapass Games](#)

Created by James Ernest with Paul Peterson



Art by Mike O'Connor

\$6.00

In 1997 England had a problem with mad cows. In 1997 France had a problem with unexploded bombs. Wouldn't the perfect solution be to bring the cows to the bombs? Just one little patriotic pep talk and you'll have your herd of mad militaristic bovines yomping through no-man's-land in no time. And wouldn't it be even better if you could earn a few dollars along the way? Sure it would!

With the release of his latest Cheapass Game, *Unexploded Cow*, designer James Ernest gives you the perfect opportunity for all this and more, like being evil to your fellow players. Isn't Mr Ernest nice to us?

Unexploded Cow is the newest Cheapass card game, designed for three to six players. It comes packaged in the standard envelope box, and contains a deck of twelve city cards, a second deck of sixty-nine Cow cards, and four pages of rules. This being a Cheapass game, your own components are required . . . in this case, a six-sided die as well as \$2000 worth of money per player in not less than \$50 denominations. The designer wisely suggests using play money instead of the real thing, but trying to lay one's hands on even that amount of play money is a big undertaking. You could use a lot of matchsticks or pennies instead.

The City Cards are valued one through twelve, and are illustrated with the number of buildings according to their value. Thus Quimper, valued at one, has a single building, whereas the ten-point Périgueux has lots. The Cow deck is split between Cow cards and Event cards. Each is illustrated from a limited range of pictures, but given an individual name and description such as "willing cow" or "decent cow." Each cow card also has a money value given for both the cost to put it into play and the reward or penalty earned when it explodes. Event cards are likewise illustrated but only have a cost to put into play and details of their effect.

The objective of the game is to gain the most money by winning the Pot and the Ante. Earning City cards throughout the game does this, and the value of the City cards held by each player is added together; the person with the highest score wins.

Play begins with each player receiving three Cow cards and contributing \$100; half of this money goes into the Pot (which fluctuates throughout the game) and the other half goes into the bank, which does not change. During their turn, a player draws, plays, and rolls.

After drawing two cards from the cow deck, a player can play any number of cards from their hand. Cow cards can be placed into the field of any player, which is the line of cows in front of each player. The owner of the field into which the cow is played immediately becomes its owner and must pay its price into the Pot. The order in which the cows are lined up is important for bomb rolls, so while a player can rearrange their own field by adding a cow, they cannot rearrange that of the player the cow was placed into. Instead, it may go at either end of the line. Event cards can also be played after their price is paid. These affect cows or bomb rolls, such as moving everyone's field of cows to the payer on their left or making an extra bomb roll.

At the end of each turn, the player rolls a single die and counts along from the rightmost cow in their field to the field of the player on their left and so on until the corresponding cow is reached. That cow finds the unexploded bomb and therefore explodes. The owning player of the cow discards it and earns the value of the cow as a reward from the farmer. This money comes from the Pot, but if the cow has a negative value, such as a sloppy or greedy cow, the owning player must pay that amount into the Pot. If a player explodes a cow in their own field during their turn, then the people of the city card currently in play rewards them and they receive that city card and its score. At the beginning of the next player's turn a new city card is drawn.

As well as Event cards, some Cow cards have special powers; these are usually placed into the fields of other players. For example, cow mechanics can defuse bombs, generals hand on any bomb they find to another cow in the same field, PFCs can steal bombs, and when the mad bomber finds a bomb, he hands a bomb to every cow in the same field and they all explode!

The game ends when the last City card is awarded for an exploded cow. Each player totals the value of the city cards they hold, and the highest total wins the Pot and the bank. The strategy behind *Unexploded Cow* is quite complex for a simple card game. Players try to seed their own fields with the more valuable cows, but other fields with cheaper ones, which can still boost the money in the Pot. Of course, the expensive cows can be stolen, offsetting this strategy.

Unexploded Cow is not quite so much fun as the previous two Cheapass Games (*Witch Trial* and *Great Brain Robbery*), and having to find \$2000 real or otherwise per player is something of a chore. Of course, having it priced in dollars and not Euros may be anathema to some (English or French), but at least the dollar is a currency that everyone understands, and let's not have something like local politics get in the way of a fun game.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

Kingdoms of Kalamar (for Dungeons & Dragons)

Published by [Kenzer & Co.](#)

Edited by David S. Kenzer



272 color pages; \$34.95

In 1994, the *Kingdoms of Kalamar* first made its appearance as a setting designed for any game system, but had numerous game stats relating to 2nd edition *Dungeons & Dragons*. Even the adventures and sourcebooks that came out for it, while aimed at "any game system" were heavily peppered with *D&D* stats. So now that the Kingdoms are an official *Dungeons & Dragons* setting, what do you get? Just the opposite, a setting with very few *D&D* specific references.

This hardcover is broken up into ten chapters with seven appendices. The first chapter, "The Humans of Tellene," gives brief information about the different types of humans found in the setting, Tellene being the name of the world. There are six different types of humans with variations within each branch. The red-haired Kalamarans, the fair-skinned Brandobians, the yellow-skinned Dejy, the blonde-haired, pale-skinned Fhokki, the olive-skinned Reanaarians and the dark-skinned, black-haired Svimohz. Each section is brief and only gives a hint as to what each culture is capable of.

In addition to the human breakdown, there are bits on warfare, religion, climate, and cities. The cities section explains how the detailed parts will be broken down when presented: Name, Population, City at a Glance, Government, Economy, Military, Temples, Mages & Sages, Underworld, Interesting Sites, and Special Notes.

Chapters two through seven cover the major countries and the subdivisions within them. For instance, under Brandobia there are four countries: Cosdol, Eldor, Mendarn, and the Theocracy of Pel Brolenon. Each section contains general background information on the country, the capital, and another city. Mendarn, for example, has its capital Ospolen and the city of Dayolen detailed under its general description. At the end of the countries the topography is listed. This includes woodlands, mountain ranges, hills, wetlands, and bodies of water. Each section has details that range from local inhabitants to actual cities that may be found within them. For example, Lendelwood is home to Lathlanian, city of the wood. In between each chapter, full color maps show the countries being covered by the chapter.

Chapter eight lists several independent organizations that can be found throughout Tellene. These range from the Secret Network of the Blue Salamander (an organization that controls thieves, assassins, and blackmailers) to the Disciples of the Creator (a network of priests and followers who believe in the Creator, a mythical being, and practice worship of this being). These organizations are only briefly described, and can be inserted into almost any campaign without too much loss.

Major languages are covered in chapter nine. There are six major human languages, one for each race. Included are details on the language, specific names, and its alphabets. Also included are Dwarven runes, Elven scripts, Hobgoblins letters, and details on Halflings and Merchant's Tongue. This is a very useful chapter to those who want to add a lot of detail to their setting, but also one that -- outside of grabbing names -- would require some practice.

The Gods of Tellene are covered in chapter ten. Here I was really hoping to see some *Dungeons & Dragons* elements

sparkle through . . . perhaps some new domains, some specialty spells, and/or some powerful items. While none of those are present, there are fifty-four gods, each one with different names according to which country the god is worshipped in. All of the major portfolios are covered from magic, time, and war, to strategy, knighthood, and honor. Each deity has a number of "generic" names -- like The True, The Blind One, The Magnificent Magistrate, The Exalted Judge -- followed by their regional specific names, their spheres of influence, alignment, symbol (with an illustration), divine focus, holy days, place of worship, colors, animal, appearance, church, clergy, raiment, sacrifice & frequency, advancement, clerics, friends/allies, foes/enemies, and sayings. There are small tables that show the title of the cleric as well as the color of clothing that the cleric should wear. At the end of the chapter is a listing of the gods by name, spheres, priesthood (name of the clergy), church name, colors, holy/unholy days, symbol of deity, divine focus, and animal. This chart is a great quick reference tool for GMs in a hurry.

Appendix I covers Celestial Bodies and Calendar. This section hosts illustrations of the stars above the world with some interesting sidebars. For example, Magnostorms are magnetic storms that effect various races' direction sense and interfere with teleportation spells. More important than the stars though, is the chronological record. Five time lines show the history of Tellene in two pages.

Appendix II covers cities. The coverage is general information and can be used in any typical fantasy setting. There is nothing here that says, "I belong in this book!" Only the City Quick-Reference Chart lets you know that the chapter is still dealing with Tellene. The cities are listed by alphabetical order, with the region, country/location, population, and page number where further details are located. Appendix III, Code of Law, is also general information that could be easy to insert into any campaign setting. Various crimes and their punishments are listed.

Appendix IV, Armies of Tellene, shows the military backbone of the various countries with a breakdown of different armies and leader. A chart shows how many troops of each type each country supports. Appendix V is a Country Chart, with country name, capital city, population, ruler, and resources. Appendix VI, Nomenclature, details a chart with domain, resident, residents plural, and things of this origin. Appendix VII is an NPC Reference chart by alphabetical order, showing the name, alignment, race/sex, location, and class level. Another useful tool, but perhaps it would have been more useful to separate entries by country or region?

The index is more like a combination between glossary and index. Each entry has a brief description of a few words and a page reference.

One of the things that *Kingdoms of Kalamar* were always known before this edition were the maps. These were always very high quality on very heavy paper. The quality is still there, but that quality of the paper has gone down. The maps are in two different places in the book with rubbery glue that's easy to remove, but leaves a stain. There is also a semi-transparent hex grid for overland travel that's easy to remove. Still, the downgrade in map paper quality means that people will have to handle these with care.

The art in the book ranges from okay to great. There are several pieces that will be familiar to old readers of the Kalamar books, included the full color cover to the "Secret Temple of Adajy" module. On the other hand, the full color illustration at http://www.kenzerco.com/dnd/kalamar_artwork_tour1.htm is black and white on page 188 in the book.

The layout is standard two-color, with pull out boxes to highlight a few *D&D* things, like magic items and a new race: the half-hobgoblin. The spacing of the text itself, though, is generous . . . especially in comparison to the *Forgotten Realms* campaign setting.

On one hand, this is a good world book. A lot of thought and detail went into it. On the other hand, it seems to have very little to do with *Dungeons & Dragons*. Even the gods don't have domains listed in the book. A lot of information in the appendices is generic enough to fit any setting. In this aspect, it's a great sourcebook for someone new to the *D&D* setting and who doesn't want a lot of new mechanics to play with, instead preferring some advice on how cities and laws should work.

On the other hand, for \$5 more, the *Forgotten Realms* is vastly superior to the *Kingdoms of Kalamar* in terms of game mechanics, text-to-page ratio, and art quality. *Kalamar*'s biggest benefit here are its superior maps, although those aren't as good as the originals.

If you're looking for an interesting setting to set your next *GURPS*, *Warhammer*, *Palladium*, or *Heroes* setting in, the *Kingdoms of Kalamar* is a bit pricey at \$35 but worth it to new players and GMs. If you're debating between the *Kingdoms of Kalamar* and the *Forgotten Realms*, spend the extra money and get all the gaming goodies as well as a setting.

Resources

- <http://www.kenzerco.com/dnd/kalamar.htm>. Questions and Answers on the *KoK*
- <http://www.rpgplanet.com/dnd3e/3esettings.htm#kalamar>. This has information about upcoming releases for *KoK* and, more importantly, a listing of domains per deity.

--Joe G. Kushner

So Who Needs Glasses?



by Charles Calvert

Secret identities.

For all the years that superheroic adventures have been played out in games and printed on a page, no concept has been more hotly debated. "Oh, come on," the detractors cry. "You're telling me that lady reporter can't recognize him? All he did was change clothes, put on a pair of glasses, and slick down his hair!" "Right, a multimillionaire whose face is all over the papers can't be identified because he wears a costume." In recent years, even the comics have taken flight from that age-old precept, abandoning it as "unrealistic," "a cliché," "old-fashioned."

But is it?

"Over in (Chicago's Eighteenth Precinct), there was a guy who dressed up as Superman and secreted himself behind a steel door in the subway. He got the frame loosened before he went behind it. He was with a robbery decoy; this guy lay down on the platform and let this street person pick his pocket. With that, the steel door comes crashing down. Out comes Superman; the guy was arrested by Superman. When it gets to court, the judge says to the officer, 'Were you the arresting officer?' 'Yes, your honor, I was.' The street person goes, 'That ain't the arresting officer. That was Superman that arrested me.' "

-- from "Pure Cop," by Connie Fletcher

The policeman was seen at close range, and for an extended duration. How could the perpetrator be mistaken?

The answer lies in optical illusions.

To begin with, take a look at the stereotypical super-suit. A neutral ground, with a central emblem in bright primary colors, much like the costume worn by that policeman above. With no mask, it doesn't look like much of a disguise, does it?

But look at the suit again. The central emblem focuses attention on the chest, making it appear larger. With solid color at the waist, the effect is to make the chest appear outsized, beyond normal proportion.

Now add briefs in a color taken from the chest emblem . . . well, to quote the "Lois and Clark" series, "they won't be looking at your face." They're not as bright as the central emblem, nor as big, but they serve the purpose of making the waist appear even smaller by comparison.

Next, boots to match the briefs, and we add several inches to the hero's visual height . . . since legs are vertical in shape, the boots can't add much width, and so the added visual size takes the form of increased height.

Finally, the ever-traditional cape, in a color to match the briefs and boots, and we expand the hero's visual width one last time. Still, even with a spit curl for style, you wouldn't expect this to make that much difference, right?

Now look at the average business suit, straight off the rack. Modern business attire, while wonderful in its way, does its best to reduce all shapes to one: the rectangle. Whether the secret identity is male or female, the modern business suit tries to turn them into a chocolate bar as far as visual perception is concerned. Solid colors with vertical pinstriping add a little height, but subtract width in order to get it. The visual chest size is reduced, the waist almost eliminated by the hanging cloth.

Uniforms go even farther. Whether it's a policeman's basic blue or a nun's habit, the first intention of any uniform is to make everyone look like everyone else. In fact, here's where we hit that poor crook back in the quote: During his arrest, he's brought down by this figure in red and blue, flowing red cape, and that big red 'S' on the front. But when he gets to the stand? A cop.

Another important identity-hiding feature is the mask, however. While less subtle, it can be equally effective.

The full-face mask, of course, is the most effective, whether you're a wallcrawler or some guy in a suit of armor. With this mask, any visual distortion can be realized, whether it's monolithic anonymity or wild alterations of the visual outline.

But the half-mask, though sometimes overlooked, is equally vital. Much like the markings of the raccoon, its purpose is to break up and distort the pattern of light and dark that makes up the face. The traditional "grim antihero" mask over the upper face, by use of dark color, lowers the forehead and emphasizes the jaw. When completed with a nasal (a projection to cover the nose), even the physical profile is changed. Upward projections can also narrow the contour.

Even if your hero doesn't wear a mask, don't discount it. A pair of glasses, a false beard, a hat . . . any of these changes the visual image, and by extension the face. That's right, the secret identity can wear masks, too!

All things considered, it seems the secret identity, however old its inception, still has a good run ahead of it.



by Chad Underkoffler

Genre: Hero Pulp with Arcane Abilities (think Doc Savage, the Shadow, Indiana Jones, *Tales of the Brass Monkey*, or street-level supers like the Batman, the Golden Age Sandman, or Captain America).

Style: Action, Adventure, and Mystery

Theme(s): Heroism, Weird Science, or Arcane Abilities must counter Weird or Arcane Threats.

Campaign Setting and Background Information

What Everybody Knows: The year is 1930. The place is Futura City. The Future is Now.

The advanced technologies pioneered by inventive genius Alexander Cain have changed the world in the aftermath of the Great War. The most ubiquitous of Cain Crystal Science's new inventions are the Cain Crystal Battery (used to power vehicles) and Cain Structural Glass (as resilient and flexible as steel, but lighter and cheaper). They have also made him wealthy beyond belief. These formulations are not easily replicated, so he is the sole provider of the cutting-edge. A few isolated scientists have been able to duplicate his technologies, but have been unable to develop processes for industrial production of them.

Wealth brings influence -- and possibly hubris as well. Cain decided to build a hyper-modern city on the Jersey Coast. His front companies quietly purchased lots of available land over the course of five years, always paying generously. Land was broken in 1927, and Cain threw himself into developing his City of Tomorrow.

In three short years, Futura City has exploded into existence. It is already becoming a major metropolis. Construction is constant. Each day brings a new wonder around the corner: the Crystal Spire, the Field of Glass, the Imperial Building, Futura City Music Hall, the Pyramid Stock Exchange, and much more.

Cain's technology is everywhere. Personal autogyros fly downtown through the holes in the crystal skyscrapers. Huge zeppelins deliver needed supplies and curious visitors. Telephones and pneumatic mail tubes are cheap and readily accessible by all. Elevated multi-level monorails provide efficient public transportation. Cain Crystal Sciences has implemented a modification of Tesla's ideas on broadcast power (unfortunately, the energy beamed out from the Crystal Spire occasionally causes volatile materials to detonate, which has led to strict statutes regarding fuel, industrial chemicals, and explosives--including gunpowder). New photographic processes have been developed, especially in the area of cinema film, kick-starting a modest Futura City movie industry.

Every day, hundreds of laborers, scientists, businessmen, philanthropists, entertainers, socialites, philosophers, entrepreneurs, industrial spies, drifters, private eyes, mystics, charlatans, and criminals come to the City of Tomorrow chasing new possibilities; each desiring to carve their own niche in its glassy towers and valleys. Gangsters, smugglers, and bootleggers have set up shop; the Futura City Police Department (also called the Crystal Cops) is there to stand against them with shock pistol in hand. Masked adventurers with colorful sobriquets have come to dance on both sides

of the Law. There are a million adventures in the crystal city, just waiting to be discovered.

What Everybody Doesn't Know

1. In the July of 1910, after a torrential rainstorm, twenty-five year old Pennsylvania dairy farmer Alexander Cain found a "crystal box" buried in a gully on his family farm. Taking a shine to it, he left it on the dresser next to his bed. After a few weeks, it began "speaking" to him, giving him methods for improving the machinery around the farm and ideas for new, even more useful inventions. Cain began building devices according to the crystal box's whispered designs. After selling an enhanced steam boiler to JP Morgan, Cain took his earnings and invested them into the stock market according to the dictates of the crystal box. In weeks, he had quintupled his money. He founded Cain Crystal Sciences in 1916; by 1919, he was a multi-millionaire. Guided by the knowledge and insight of the crystal box, Alexander Cain began to bring his wildest dreams into reality.
2. People with verifiable mystical, mental, or arcane abilities-- true clairvoyants, mediums, mesmerists, ritual magicians, gadgeteers, etc.-- have begun appearing within the last two decades. Their arrival coincides with the discovery of Alexander Cain's crystal box. Is it raising the ambient mana level of Earth or is Atlantean psionanotechnology infecting the biosphere?
3. The crystal box is a piece of lost Atlantean technology. Whether its bizarre hyper-science (and concomitant increase in wild talents in the population) is based on advanced technology, the forces of magic, or accessing psi energies is currently unknown.

NPCs and Their Goals

Alexander Cain, Genius Inventor and Industrialist: Over the years, Cain has picked up enough scientific, engineering, and industrial knowledge to hold his own in conversation. He has a vision for the future: a vision of everyone living in clean crystal towers where all their needs are met with a single thought. He is an active philanthropist and patron of the arts. He's known as the First Citizen of Futura City.

Goals (pick one): 1) Cain is a good soul, and really does want the best for everyone. He's using this fire stolen from heaven to try and help humanity elevate itself. 2) Cain has been driven completely mad by the constant whisperings of the crystal box in his mind. He's speeding hell bent for leather towards the future, directed only by his whims and the Atlantean influence. 3) Cain knows exactly what he's doing. Careful manipulation of science, industry, and technology will grant him the power he's always dreamed of. Someone needs to rule the world; it may as well be King Cain.

Joshua Cohen, Blackmail King: Joshua Cohen and his Mob rode into Futura City on the blackmailed-back of his cousin -- financier Abraham Roth -- and a tidal wave of bootleg Scotch. The Cohen Mob controls 75% of the City of Tomorrow's speakeasies and back-room casinos. Currently, Cohen's at war with "Big Danny" O'Malley and his boys.

Goals: Cohen wants to sell booze, run casinos, blackmail wealthy sorts, and make as much money as possible, to give his "dependents" a good, secure life.

Dr. Eclipse, Brooding Mastermind Gadgeteer: Dr. Eclipse (first name unknown) is one of the few scientists who has been able to catch the outlines of Cain's crystal technologies. He's invented a number of unique devices that could be of great value to the Futura City PD (or the military) if he could just mass-produce them. After having met Cain a number of times, Eclipse is convinced that Cain could not have conceived this crystal technology on his own.

Goals: Dr. Eclipse wants to know how to mass-produce Cain's crystal technology. He's been able to figure out how to duplicate (and even modify) some of it, but large portions of the technology still has him baffled. Right now, he's unsure whether he's driven to discover the industrial processes for crystal technology or just to uncover the secret of who Cain got it from. He could be a masked hero, villain, or shadowy mastermind.

Rocko Kablowski, Heavyweight Contender: A great big ape of a guy, Rocko's brawn is matched only by the size of his heart. Of course, before his boxing career took off, he did some strong-arm work for the Cohen Mob . . .

Goals: Rocko wants to become the heavyweight champion of the world and to outrun his seedy past.

Kelly McNamara, Secretary and Industrial Spy: It hasn't been that long since the Irish were treated like subhumans. Kelly McNamara grew up poor and being looked down on, and it affected her. Money is her ticket to being treated the way she believes she deserves to be treated, and money will let her treat others the way she wants to treat them. Passing sensitive information for a buck is a lot more lucrative than taking dictation from some fat cat. And when you have expensive tastes, you need the sawbucks.

Goals: Make money by stealing industrial information without being caught. Pay cash for a '31 Cain Crystal Battery Dusenberg when it rolls off the assembly line.

Other NPCs to use in your Futura City Campaign:

- **Daniel "Big Danny" O'Malley**, Irish Gangster and Smuggler
- **Waldo "Ace" Powell**, Movie Star, Daredevil Pilot, and Playboy
- **Abraham Roth**, Financier and Blackmail Victim
- **Professor Hans von Shockenstein**, Former Lab Assistant to Alexander Cain, now Gadgeteering Science Pirate!
- **Rebecca Telford**, Chemical Heiress and Socialite
- **Yvonne Garcy**, Singing Sensation (and Secretly the Sister of von Shockenstein!)
- **The Wraith**, Mysterious Mystic Avenger

Items and Locales

- **The Crystal Box:** A bottle-green rectangle of glass, about the size of a cigarette case. It is warm to the touch. Whatever you decide about the crystal box will have a tremendous effect on your campaign. Is it an Atlantean computer? A prison for the astral form of an Atlantean criminal? Could it be just a hunk of radioactive glass that somehow unlocked the potential of Cain's mind? Is it a mind control device of the Illuminati? You make the call!
- **Crystal Spire:** A slender blue spire of glass that rises up out of the Bay and broadcasts power throughout the City of Tomorrow. Do the harbor fish swarm around it, or do they die in agony? Does the Spire shine at night, or are its emanations invisible? Will Abraham Roth's plan to piggyback radio station WFCT's signal on the Crystal Spire's energy broadcast work?

Other locations to use in your Futura City Campaign

- **The Field of Glass** (This is just a cool name; what is it in your campaign? A solar energy collector? An underground greenhouse? A new sports arena?)
- **The Imperial Building:** The tallest building on the planet, pierced with monorail lines and autogyro access tunnels.
- **Futura City Music Hall:** Where the elite are entertained.
- **The Pyramid Stock Exchange:** Small now, but there are millions to be made in Futura City . . . on margin!

Events and NPC Intersections

- **Heavyweight Championship:** Big Danny O'Malley is pressuring Rocko to take a dive, but the Cohen Mob is threatening to let Rocko's leg-breaking days for them go public if he loses. What's a mug to do?
- **Movie Opening:** Waldo Powell and Yvonne Garcy are certainly the most handsome couple at the premiere of Powell's new air-war movie *Winged Knights*. Rebecca Telford is resplendent in her new Cain miracle fiber evening gown provided by her escort, Alexander Cain, but she is not paying the First Citizen any heed -- she only has dreamy eyes for Ace Powell!
- **Speakeasy, Speak Softly:** Rebecca Telford and Kelly McNamara frequent the same Cohen Mob gin joint on the West Side. They've struck up quite the friendship, despite the difference in their social circles, which Telford is

not cognizant of. When Telford is kidnapped by Professor von Shockenstein, who will she go to -- Alexander Cain, or her secret ally, Dr. Eclipse?

Possible Story Arcs

Story arcs -- or continuing threads that weave throughout a campaign -- are one of the things that really make a game stand out. The development of a long-term plot that can be seen from a distance, will keep the campaign in your players' memory for years to come. They can be easy to implement; a solitary mention of an NPC action or random event in an adventure can often propel a story arc along. Never neglect to listen to your players (not just their PCs, but *players'*) theories about What's Going On. Often coming up with added bells and whistles you never thought of, this can occasionally develop a more elegant story arc altogether. Remain flexible, open to ideas, and steal from your players ruthlessly.

Three interesting story arcs to incorporate into your Futura City campaign could include:

- **The First Citizen's Descent Into Madness.** Start Cain as sane but driven, drop a single hint of increasingly bizarre behavior each adventure, then bring him out as a full-raving loon further down the road.
- **Difficulty of Crystal Technology Replication.** Why can't scientists duplicate Cain Crystal Sciences' devices? This could be an excellent subplot about the value of handcrafting items vs. industrial products. Or perhaps the issue is solely about having "weirdly talented" people working the line? A machine shop full of empaths and clairvoyants would be quite a different place to work from the norm.
- **Love, Exciting and New.** A romance subplot between Garcy, Powell, and Telford could have interesting repercussions on the game-world once you work out how their friends and foes react to the other lovebirds' friends and foes. Will Cain try to crush Powell's acting career? Did von Shockenstein kidnap Telford so that his little sister could win her boyfriend back? Will Telford use her wealth and influence to buy Garcy's recording contract, then hang the songbird out to dry?

Genre Advice

"Pulp is not simply a genre or era fixed in stone, it is really a state of mind. Fast-paced and energetic adventures. Exotic locales and two-fisted action. A wistful and nostalgic glimpse of an era that seems familiar but more simpler, innocent and daring. Pulp is all these and more. Some features of the pulp genre include its simple morality of good versus evil, masked and cloaked heroes and heroines, devious villains and their schemes, gun-wielding desperados, cliffhanger endings, weird science, and a world still lush with unexplored places and lost races. Understanding the nostalgic elements of the material the pulps cover and the stylistic conventions used in them are essential in squeezing the most enjoyment out of this rip-snorting and adrenaline-laced gaming genre."

-- Brian Misiaczek, *THE PULP AVENGERS: Game Mastering Pulp Adventures in the 1930s and 1940s*
(http://www.columbia.edu/~mfs10/Brians_Pulp_File.html)

The above quote sums the genre up nicely. Brian Misiaczek's *THE PULP AVENGERS* is a great resource, and is one that can be returned to again and again, and used for a number of campaigns. Check it out!

Advice: go with it. Live larger than life. Take unreasonable risks. Laugh at danger. Let the villain paste you one on your lantern jaw, then get back up and knock him down. Death is present, but only if you lose your nerve.

Style Advice

The watchwords of the pulp genre are action, adventure, and mystery.

- *Action.* Keep each adventure moving. Mild conflict should be happening at all times -- and not just combat. Interpersonal friction, high-speed autogyro chases, romantic interactions, scaling buildings like human flies, intense social affairs -- keep it all moving.

- *Adventure*. Keep the risks and rewards high. Adventure is all about chancing danger for gain. If action is the stick, adventure is the carrot. Hang out hidden information, secret formulas, money, fame, freedom, and safety as bait to lure your players into action.
- *Mystery*. Mystery is all about keeping things veiled, and letting the players figure it all out. Let the players work for a solution; resist the temptation to either make things easier or harder. Decide on a simple, one-twist mystery, and let it lie to be poked and prodded at. Emphasize ambiguity, vagueness, and nebulousness around your mysteries. Don't overdo it -- it shouldn't take Sherlock Holmes, Jr. an hour to remember where he parked his autogyro or if he had eggs for breakfast, but the symbol carved in the murder victim's forehead should not be too easily identified.

Theme Advice

The concept here is that Weird science (or Arcane abilities) are best countered by a combination of Heroism and Weird Science (or Arcane abilities). You just can't call out the Army when Alexander Cain goes mad and turns the Crystal Spire power transmitter into a Death Ray. What about when Joshua Cohen has paid Professor von Shockenstein to dose Rocko Kablowski with An-vitamins before the title bout? Or when the Wraith falls off of the Imperial Building and starts to plummet 150 stories to his death?

The PCs can and should be the ones involved in handling these issues. Their abilities and outlook make them the perfect candidates to run right in where angels fear to tread. They should stand against the odd and the powerful to protect the mundane and weak, be it from a rampaging 10-foot tall robot or the blind eye of emergent hyper-technology. That's the theme of a Futura City Campaign.

Opportunities & Pitfalls

Pulp or cliffhanger adventures are great ways to get your action ya-yas out. It's a simpler, more idealistic period; heroes are heroes and villains are villains. The ends justify the means. To a modern aesthetic, that may seem trite, silly, or downright dangerous.

Make sure all the players are on the same page as you before trying to run a pulpy game. If even one player out of the group plays it more lightly or more post-modern, that can have a strong effect on your plots or adventures. If the PCs are constantly questioning the motives of the Police Commissioner who calls for their help, how will they ever stop the Museum Burglar's escape autogyro?

Guns. In some ways, guns can be the biggest threat to the whole pulp vibe. They are not necessarily a trump card, as they're not really as deadly as in real life (at least not to the PCs and major villains). Guns shouldn't be much more deadly to the major characters in a pulp game than the average dagger or shortsword in a fantasy game. Implement system rules like penalties to firearms skills at close range, spend experience to make an injury "only a flesh wound," allow a "healing" back of some health after a combat round, or the like to minimize the effect of guns. Or you could opt to use genre conventions like "the first bullet always misses"; this allows the hero to jump for cover. Another interesting convention to use is named/unnamed foes (like *Feng Shui*'s mooks or S. John Ross's "[Beyond the Grip of Realism](#)" scrubs) to minimize the value of firearms. Guns should be a useful tool, not a magic wand.

Other Tips & Tricks

An interesting GM "trick" to use is an *NPC Interaction Matrix*. The NPC Interaction Matrix is handy, especially when your PCs ask an NPC how they feel about a second NPC, and you need to come up with an answer on the fly. Indeed, you can use it to develop plots, scenes, and adventures, just by looking to see how NPCs react to each other without the presence of PCs to muddy the water.

A quick example, using a subset of the NPCs we've mentioned here, we can illustrate some complex relationships. Let's say that Dr. Eclipse has hired Kelly McNamara to infiltrate Cain Crystal Sciences as a member of the corporate

secretarial pool. Let's throw in Rocko Kablowski as a romantic interest for Kelly, too. We could show this by:

	AC	DE	RK	KM
AC		-	+	+
DE	-!		-	*(+!)
RK	+	+		+
KM	+(n)	*(+!)	+	

AC = Alexander Cain

DE = Doctor Eclipse

RK = Rocko Kablowski

KM = Kelly McNamara

+ = Likes

+! = Ally

- = Dislikes

-! = Enemy

* = Haven't Met

n = No Opinion

() = Secretly. . .

Okay, the way we read this is by cross-referencing NPC initials to NPC initials. Thus:

- Alexander Cain dislikes Dr. Eclipse, likes Rocko Kablowski, and likes Kelly McNamara (she's very attentive during dictation).
- Doctor Eclipse sees Cain as his enemy, dislikes Rocko, and acts as if he hasn't met McNamara (who he's secretly allied to).
- Rocko Kablowski is a genial sort, and likes Cain, Dr. Eclipse, and McNamara.
- Kelly McNamara pretends to like Cain (who she could care less about but doesn't actively dislike), likes Rocko, and claims to have never met Dr. Eclipse (who she's secretly allied to).

Mismatches between the opinions of NPCs -- like Dr. Eclipse seeing Cain as an enemy and Cain merely disliking Eclipse, or Rocko liking Eclipse while Eclipse finds him distasteful -- can make for complex and vibrant interactions when the PCs are talking to NPCs. This Matrix can be used to help NPCs seem more like real people, with motivations and opinions of their own.

Pyramid Review

Pyramid Review: Dungeons (for d20)

Dungeons (for d20)

Published by [Alderac Entertainment Group](#)

Written by Nancy Berman, Noah Dudley, Peter Flanagan, Mike Mearls, Jim Pinto, John Seavey, Eric Steiger, Serge Stelmack, Greg Stolze, Ree Soesbee, and Steve Wright



Illustrated by Julian Aguilera, Storn Cook, Liz Danforth, Jonathan Hunt, A. Bleys Ingram, Scott James, Richard Pollard, and Mike Sellers

Edited by Ree Soesbee and Rob Vaux

128 pages; \$19.95

So far, Alderac Entertainment has taken a "short and sweet" approach to their *d20* offerings, presenting the *Adventure Keep* series of brochure-sized adventures. *Dungeons* is their first full-size *d20* book, but it's not really a single work. As you might guess from the long list of authors above, it's a collection of essays and tips. The tips are good, but design problems keep the whole of this collection from being as good as the sum of its parts.

There are four main sections. "Tips and Tricks" explores general principles of dungeon design from both the player's and the gamemaster's perspective. "Dungeon Types" describes eight basic styles of dungeon -- from fortresses to subterranean communities to the ever-popular madman's lair -- and presents suggestions for designing each style. The "Player" section focuses on new skills, spells and prestige classes for dungeon-delving player characters, while the "Dungeon Master" section presents monsters, magic items, traps, and some short sample dungeons.

Each section accomplishes its basic goal, progressing naturally from topic to topic and covering its subject in a detailed and logical manner. The "Tips and Tricks" section begins by addressing players and providing useful tips for safe -- well, not as dangerous -- dungeon delving. Each of the player hints does double duty as a gamemaster hint, though, reminding GMs of design elements that will add challenge and atmosphere to their own dungeons. After the first essay covers the information most useful to players, the next essay quietly shifts gears and addresses GMs. The transition is subtle but definite -- it's always easy to tell who will get the most benefit out of a piece. Players will probably find this book less useful than gamemasters will. Everything in the book is useful to GMs, but a player who never runs games will find only about half of the book immediately useful.

It's easy to tell that the essays were written by different writers -- you may not know who wrote what, but you can hear the differences in style from piece to piece -- but the book is remarkably consistent. There is a noticeable absence of contradictions and redundancies in the text, which speaks well of the editors. Either they planned the book very carefully, or they did a bang-up job of fixing the glitches typical of a group work.

Despite this care, *Dungeons* doesn't quite work. Its design problems suggest that nobody really asked themselves, "Who are we writing this book for, and how will we attract them to it?"

Most of the suggestions are basic advice, the kind that has cropped up in how-to-gamemaster gaming articles since the early days of *Dragon*. There's the physics of traps, the importance of creating a history of the dungeon so you can extrapolate the changes it has gone through, the food needs of the common dungeon monster, et cetera. This is all valuable material, even if it has appeared in other places before. As long as there are new gamemasters, there will be gamemasters who need to read this information for the first time, and even old geezer GMs can use occasional reminders of the many ways you can give treasure and the dangers of flash floods in sewers.

The content should appeal to less experienced gamemasters, but the presentation probably won't. The layout is simple and a bit dull. There isn't much white space to catch the eye, just block after block of text insufficiently set off by the small headers. When you flip through the book on the shelf, nothing stands out. Add the boring cover to the mix, and you have a book that's likely to be ignored by the gamemasters who will get the most benefit from it.

It's easy to see that *Dungeons* is modeled on the *Dungeons and Dragons Player's Handbook*, which has plenty of long blocks of very small text. The *Player's Handbook* works, however, because of the features that *Dungeon* doesn't reproduce. There are more tables to break up the text, and the art appears in a greater variety of positions. Because the *Player's Handbook* is in color, it can create more variations in fonts, artwork and backgrounds. The *Player's Handbook* also serves a slightly different purpose than *Dungeons*. It is primarily a reference work, meant to be consulted when players need to know what an attack bonus is instead of read cover to cover. Due to its essay format, *Dungeons* is more of a reading work than a reference work, and the repetitive design of the book is more of a drawback.

Of course, *Dungeons* didn't have the production budget that the *Player's Handbook* did, so there's no way it could have reproduced all of the *Player's Handbook's* deluxe features. But if the editors had taken a different design approach, they could have circumvented some of the problems. The essays are useful, but summary checklists and other tools would break up the text and make it easier for gamemasters to put the book's advice into practice. Flowcharts and step-by-step dungeon design tutorials would have made the book more useful and added visual interest.

Dungeons is a good effort, but Alderac needs to take some lessons from its previous *d20* offerings. The Adventure Keep modules leap off the shelf because their covers -- while simple -- catch the eye, and it's easy to spot useful material during a quick flip through any given adventure. Hopefully Alderac's next *d20* book will be just as appealing.

-- Chris Aylott

The Peculiar Flight Of Rudolf Hess

*"He is insane. He is the Dove of Peace.
He is Messiah. He is Hitler's niece.
He is the one, clean, honest man they've got.
He is the worst assassin of the lot."*
-- A.P. Herbert, on Rudolf Hess

That doggerel quatrain neatly brackets the bisociative Deputy Führer of the quondam Third Reich, Rudolf Hess, who sixty years and one month ago leapt the surly bonds of Earth and joined the all-star enigma list. Although he was plenty goofy before he took the high road to Scotland, it's in Hess' flight and fate that our high weirdness sensors detect a mother lode. You know something pretty special is going on, after all, when *Hitler* calls a guy crazy. Let's drill down, then, and see if, somewhere in his madness, Rudi has a message for us.

"My Führer, when you receive this letter, I shall be in England. You can imagine that the decision to take this step has not been easy for me."
-- letter of Rudolf Hess to Adolf Hitler, May 10, 1941

To start with, let's look at what history records. On the evening of May 10, 1941, expert pilot Rudolf Hess climbed into a twin-engined Messerschmitt 110 fighter-bomber on the tarmac of the Messerschmitt works at Augsburg. Shortly after 10 p.m., a man calling himself "Alfred Horn" walked up to a Scottish farmer near the town of Eaglesham (south of Glasgow) and asked to be taken to Dungavel House, the home of the Duke of Hamilton. The suspicious farmer called the authorities, and "Horn" was rapidly unmasked as Rudolf Hess. Hitler's propaganda machine immediately declared Hess to have gone insane; British propaganda, on the other hand, did almost nothing to exploit the defection of Germany's Deputy Führer. Hess was locked up in the Tower of London, then transferred to a secret "Camp Z" site in Surrey, and thence to Abergavenny in Wales. After the war, he was tried at Nuremberg, sentenced to life imprisonment in Spandau Prison, held almost entirely incommunicado for forty years, and died of strangulation in 1987 at the age of 93, an apparent suicide.

"Certain of Hess's closest friends have thrown an interesting light on the affair. They say that Hess has always been Hitler's astrologer in secret. Up to last March he had consistently predicted good fortune and had always been right. Since then, notwithstanding the victories that Germany has won, he has declared that the stars showed that Hitler's meteoric career was approaching its climax."
-- *Times* of London, May 14, 1941

Also on May 10, 1941, a conjunction of six planets occurred in Taurus, coinciding with a full moon. Hess' personal astrologer, Ernst Schulte-Strathaus, pointed out the unique configuration to Hess, noting that it combined extraordinary danger to Hitler with extraordinary potential for world-shaking changes in international politics. (According to Ellic Howe's fascinating *Urania's Children*, Schulte-Strathaus even "joked" that the conjunction could cause a [pole shift](#) not unlike that latterly predicted for [May 5, 2000](#).) Hess, the theory goes, already a confirmed believer in astrology, anthroposophy, and the magical power of herbs, decided to take Hitler's fate as his own (which may be why his alias "Albert Horn" had the initials "A.H."), make a separate peace with Britain, and thus redeem Germany -- and Hess' flagging political fortunes. Peter Levenda and other authors (of varying reliability) even suggest that Schulte-Strathaus had been fed astrological disinformation by the British "dirty tricks" units under Ian Fleming -- still wilder speculation touches on MI5-forged copies of [Nostradamus](#) or other astrological texts cunningly placed in German bookshops. To Hitler, of course, it served as evidence that the astrologers were all out to get him, and he ordered the SS to round up and imprison astrologers in June 1941 under the code-name *Aktion Hess*. It's only fair to point out that *Aktion Hess* might have been a Bormann-Heydrich plot to weaken the equally occult Himmler politically -- or magically.

"[T]he people around me during my imprisonment acted towards me in a peculiar and incomprehensible way, in a way which led me to conclude that these people somehow were acting in an abnormal state of mind. Some of them -- these persons and people around me were changed from time to time. Some of the new ones who came to me in place of those who had been changed had strange eyes. They were glassy and like eyes in a dream."

-- statement of Rudolf Hess before the Nuremberg War Crimes Tribunal, August 31, 1946

Heydrich's name comes up in another context -- the "Hess double" theory. Heydrich may have, the story goes, intercepted Hess (possibly while refueling at a Danish airfield), executed him on the spot, and sent a double to Britain to determine the extent of Hess' contacts. This seems, it must be admitted, like a very pointless plan, even for Heydrich. On the other hand, some sources do claim that the Messerschmitt that crashed in Scotland had a different tail number than the one which took off from Augsburg -- which could be explained by that refueling stop. More than that, however, the pilots also seem to have changed. Not only was the Hess who landed in Scotland considerably more frail and addled than the strutting newsreel hero who took off from Germany -- he was missing a scar. Rudolf Hess was shot through the lung in World War One; the prisoner of Spandau had no scar tissue on his chest or back. His dental records don't match descriptions of Hess' teeth, either. Either anthroposophic herbal healing works better than it has any right to, or something winky is going on.

Allen Dulles, of the OSS, sent Dr. Ewen Cameron to Spandau "to establish the state of mind of Rudolf Hess" -- and (so the story goes) to check Hess' chest for that evasive bullet scar. Cameron, by the way, continued his OSS-CIA career as head of a Montreal psychiatric clinic doing contract work for MK-ULTRA -- the CIA mind control program. Was Cameron checking for telepathic influence on Hess? Or was he, ahem, "establishing" it? Could Cameron have drained Hess' memories, of [Nazi Antarctic bases](#) (Hess, we are told, sponsored the Antarctic Expedition of 1938 and kept the "Polar File" for Hitler) or UFOs, for later CIA analysis -- or replication? Speaking of replication, there's always Mengele and his cloning experiments -- and some clones seem to age preternaturally, like Hess apparently did.

One intriguing possibility is that there really was a high-level (even royal) cabal attempting to surrender England to the Nazis, and although Churchill intercepted Hess, he couldn't risk exposing Hess' fascist allies in Britain and wrecking public morale. Hence, Hess had to die in secret -- possibly in the mysterious plane crash that killed the Duke of Kent (part, obviously, of this phantom royal surrender ring) in 1942. Until 1987, the British could count on Soviet bitterness to keep the pseudo-Hess incommunicado -- but when Gorbachev offered to release Hess as a gesture of goodwill, MI5 strangled their double. Between the peculiarities of identity, the tangled webs of politics and perception, and all-encompassing secrecy, "Spandau Prisoner No. 7" has become a 20th-century [Man in the Iron Mask](#).

"Hitler put the blame for Hess's flight on the corrupting influence of Professor Haushofer. Twenty-five years later, in Spandau prison, Hess assured me in all seriousness that the idea had been inspired in him in a dream by supernatural forces."

-- Albert Speer, *Inside the Third Reich*

Here's another possibility. The prisoner was, in fact, a tulpa, a thought-form created by focused vril energy using powerful Tibetan magics. Hess was carrying a Tibetan amulet when he flew to Scotland, and we've already mentioned his deep involvement in anthroposophic vegetarian ritual (the "prisoner of Spandau" ate steak, by the way). Hess was one of the first students of Professor Karl Haushofer, whose personal [connections with Tibet](#) helped add a little occult oomph to Nazism. (Hess and Haushofer also both joined the Thule Society, which you knew was going to show up here sooner or later.) Hess may also have been a member of *les Veilleurs* ("the Watchers"), a magical sect centered in Paris and the Rhineland between the wars. Another batch of Watchers are the [Enochian](#) Grigori -- who, as "egregores", provide a Western synonym for tulpas. Hess' flight (like [Lindbergh's](#)) can be seen as an attempt to make contact with the Grigori, or with the ["spirits of air and darkness"](#) that he may have met while circling the Zugspitze (the highest mountain in Germany) during air races in the 1930s. This, by the way, is another connection with the Duke of Hamilton -- the Duke was the first man to fly over yeti-rich and tulpa-haunted Mount Everest, in 1936. The "real" Hess flew off to [Antarctica](#) or Argentina in a UFO to direct the building of the Refuge, leaving his tulpa in the hands of the British.

"According to what Ewen [Cameron] told her, Hess was a highly dedicated member of the Brotherhood [of the Snake], even more so than Hitler. Hess left Hitler's Germany in 1941 for Scotland in order to meet someone and participate in some sort of magical ritual. It involved time travel, and Ewen boasted about it as if it was successful. The control group were waiting for an Aryan planet, known as Marduk, to come into resonant orbit with that of Mars."

-- Peter Moon, *The Black Sun*

Hess was, in a way, to the magic born; his father was a German merchant in Alexandria, Egypt, and Hess grew up in that center of Hellenistic magery until he was sent to Bavaria in 1906. Which means, of course, that the young Hess and Aleister Crowley (another mountain-ascending fan) might have met, since Crowley received the psychically-dictated *Book of the Law* in Egypt in 1904. (A book, by the way, that he saw a number of parallels to in Hitler's -- and Hess' -- *Mein Kampf*.) Crowley, of course, may have worked with MI5 on their astrological dirty-tricks program -- he certainly knew Maxwell Knight, the legendary "M", well enough to initiate him into the OTO. Hess might also have been working (as Peter Moon proposes above) to alter history through time travel somehow -- and perhaps it was an alternate time-track Hess (with no bullet scar) or an aged (but futuristically-healed) Hess who landed in Scotland. Finally, the mention of Scotland leads to the speculation that Hess' true goal was the Holy Grail, hidden (no doubt) in the Rosslyn Chapel of the Sinclairs. Could a British royal conspiracy have attempted to purchase Britain's freedom by turning over the Holy Grail to Hitler? Could Rudolf Hess and Aleister Crowley have planned a ritual to literally turn the world upside down? Did not just the future, but all of history, turn on the flight of a Tibetan doppelgänger through the ["wide gap in time"](#) opened up by a conjunction in Taurus? If so, it's a good thing that Heydrich, or Churchill, or those pestiferous Scottish fogs, or a suspicious farmer, or your PCs, stopped him short of success. But if you're looking for someone to keep your campaign's secrets while sending your players off into the swastika-spangled wild blue yonder, well, Rudi can't fail.

Dork Tower!



Dork Tower!



Murphy's Rules



by John Kovalic

Murphy's Rules



Murphy's Rules



The Undying Villain

Lots of GM tricks try to tell you to keep your cool villains alive. And that's definitely a good idea, in my mind. After all, really neat villains are difficult to come by. But done poorly, saving a beloved (or behated) villain could well tick off your players. Why? Well, because (depending on the genre) keeping a bad guy alive usually means handing some defeat to the heroes; snatching away the deathblow, having the body disappear, or otherwise have some *dice ex machina* appear. It would be like, in the last five minutes of a Monopoly game, throwing a glass of Mountain Dew in the face of the player with the most money and shouting, "**Fool!** Uncle Moneybags shall not be defeated so easily! He escapes to fight again! Ha ha ha!", then swiping the stack of \$500s he has hidden under the edge of the board.

Of course, as I said, this depends a lot on the genre. Four-color Supers expects (and often requires) capturing and containing bad guys, only to place them in the Maximum Security Papier-Mâché And Chicken Wire Prison. Keeping them alive -- or not having a verifiable body -- is one of the conventions. But lots of genres don't allow such chivalrous behavior. So what's a GM to do to keep their favorite baddie alive?

Here are some tips:

- Make sure you need to keep the bad guy alive. After all, one moustache-twirling fiend is the same as another. But if you have a neat background, hook, methodology, or other mannerism, then keeping him around can be worthwhile.
- As an alternative, consider keeping around a minion. If the heroes keep defeating the big Bad Guy, but there's a lesser henchman or lackey that's developing a life of his own, why not let the lackey live? He can be kind of like an evil Wedge from *Star Wars*. I've done this in a fair number of campaigns, and it's always seemed to be enjoyed. Many players like continuity (but often don't like to lose), so having a lesser character that's continuously defeated -- but escapes -- is often appreciated. (Advanced option: Once that lackey is established, consider having him visit the heroes. He claims that his current boss has gone over the line, and he feels compelled to stop him. Is he lying? Has he had a change of heart? Or is he being used -- subtly -- by the mastermind?)
- If you want to keep the bad guy around, you probably want to limit the amount of direct exposure he allows himself to the good guys; otherwise, the possibility exists of the heroes trying to attack (and possibly defeat) him. "Greetings; I am Synnystyr the Migh...." "GET HIM!!" Holographic/illusory projections, letters, and other indirect evidence is ideal for keeping such villains alive.
- Consider a hook for keeping him alive. If the villain has diplomatic immunity, or possesses a spell that renders him immune to death (and/or resurrects him), is an integral part of the balance of the universe (such that his death would cause Bad Things to happen), or has some other method of staying alive, then direct confrontation can still be possible. In this case, the heroes may undergo epic quests to figure out how to remove this advantage so they can deal with this fiend once and for all.

There are other methods; I might return to them when I get another undead topic (see below). In general, though, I think it's crucial to keep things interesting while making the heroes feel important, and not subservient to the whims of the GM. (Whether they *are* subservient to GM whims is another matter . . . just so they don't feel that way . . . <grin>)

* * *

The reason I'm speaking of undying enemies is because my dear friend, the coin-weighing puzzle, haunted my inbox again this week.

The question most oft asked this week was whether or not the solution presented was too complicated. The answer is yes and no; last week's solution presumes you don't know whether the odd coin is heavier or lighter. If you *do* know, then it's a much easier puzzle.

For example, if you know that it's heavier, then you could divide the 18 coins into three piles of six, weigh two of them, and discard the lighter one. (If they're equal, it's in the unweighed pile.) Then you can divide the remaining six

coins into three piles of two, weigh two of them against each other, and discard the lighter one. (Again, if they're equal, it's in the unweighed pile.) Finally, just weigh the two coins against each other.

Now, with this version of the puzzle, you'll probably note that we're getting off easy. For the last weighing we don't need to divide the coins into three piles; we still could still determine the heavier coin if there were three coins left. Working backwards, we can see that this version of the puzzle will work with 27 coins initially.

So, in a nutshell, last week's puzzle solution is needlessly complex if you know that the odd coin is heavier or lighter. But if you don't, you'll probably need to do something similarly arcane.

(Ironically, this version of the puzzle I don't think is particularly unfair; you should be able to explain it -- and the solution -- without notes, scrap paper, or props. And since this version is modular and incremental, you can let smart *characters* make Intelligence/IQ/Smarts rolls to reveal the first step without revealing the whole thing, yet giving them a significant clue as to how to progress.)

Okay; having said that, I must also point out that I was wrong with last week solution. (*Yeah*, I hear the loyal readership say. *What else is new?*) At one point I said that, in each batch of three weighings, one of them would be equal, thus eliminating four. Well, as an astute reader pointed out, coins E, I, and O are present in all three weighings; if any of those coins is the odd one, then all three weighings will be unbalanced. Of course, the solution is still good, and logic should be able to tell you where the odd coin is if it's one of those three. (As a hint, if all three weighings are unbalanced, then you've narrowed it down to one of those three . . .)

* * *

Finally, I received some questions regarding last week's casket puzzle. Here's that solution.

To recap:

Gold: The portrait is in this casket.

Silver: The portrait is not in this casket.

Lead: The portrait is not in the gold casket.

You know that, at most, one of the statements is true; where's the portrait?

Since you know that at most one of the three is true, let's suppose none are true. Then the Gold and Lead caskets would contradict, so we know that a) at least one of the three statements is true, and b) it's either Gold or Lead that must be true. If Lead is true, then the portrait must be in the Gold casket; but then the portrait is *not* in the Silver casket. Since that would also be a true statement, we'd be breaking the rule about more than one true statement. Therefore Lead must be true and Gold must be false; thus Silver must be false, and so the portrait is in the Silver casket.

(Now I know how Click 'n' Clack feel . . .)

--*Steven Marsh*

* * *

*Last week's answer: **Killer**, various editions.*

(Four stars)

"There was a young man from Sybar
Who was stung on the nose by a wasp
We said 'Does it hurt?'
He replied, 'Not at all,
It can do it again if it likes.' "



by **Stephen Dedman**

The following NPCs are designed to be used when a GM or PC need a small gang of 25-point or 75-point criminals for a -10 point Enemy disadvantage, a supervillain's Ally group, a crowd in an underworld dive, a cellblock riot, a few "cut-outs" for an Intelligence Organization, some dupes for the Illuminati, or even some trouble-prone dependents.

Most character backgrounds are presented with modern-day campaigns in mind, particularly *GURPS Supers* and *GURPS Voodoo*, but most will only need a few changes to adapt them from any setting from the far future to the Old West or even earlier.

Aaron "Harry" Kosminski, Crooked Cop

ST: 11 [10] **Basic Damage** Thrust: 1d-1 Swing: 1d+1

DX: 11 [10] Dodge: 5 Parry: 6 (Shortsword) Block: 5

IQ: 10 [0] Basic Speed: 5.25 Move: 5 (6 running)

HT: 10 [0]

Advantages: Alertness +1; Contact (Street, skill-15, available on a 9 or less, somewhat reliable) [2]; Legal Enforcement Powers [5]; Patron (Houston PD, appears on 6 or less) [8].

Disadvantages: Duty (on 12 or less) [-10]; Greed [-15]; Secret (Criminal activity) [-10]; Sense of Duty (fellow cops) [-10].

Quirks: S.C.A. member; Sings (loudly and badly) when drunk; Tries to avoid physical work; Wants to become a Vice squad detective; Collects antique and modern weapons.

Skills: Acting-9 [1]; Administration-9 [1]; Area Knowledge (Houston)-9 [1/2]; Brawling-12 [2]; Computer Operations/TL7-9 [1/2]; Criminology/TL7-7 [1/2]; Detect Lies-9 [2]; Driving/TL7 (Car)-11 [2]; Fast-Draw (Pistol)-10 [1/2], (Shortsword)-10 [1/2]; Fast-Talk-8 [1/2]; First Aid/TL7-9 [1/2]; Forensics/TL7 [1/2]; Guns/TL7 (Pistol)-14 [2], (Shotgun)-13 [1]; Holdout-9 [1]; Interrogation-9 [1]; Judo-9 [2]; Knife-10 [1/2]; Law-8 [1]; Motorcycle/TL7-10 [1/2]; Professional Skill (Law Enforcement)-10 [2]; Riding (Horse)-9 [1/2]; Running-7 [1/2]; Savoir-Faire-9 [1/2]; Shield-10 [1/2]; Shortsword-12 [4]; Stealth-10 [1]; Streetwise-10 [2].

Maneuvers: Arm Lock-10 [1]; Choke Hold-8 [1]; Retain Weapon (Pistol)-1.

75-point version: Add Combat Reflexes; High Pain Threshold; Rank/1 (Detective); +1 to IQ and IQ-based skills, +1 to DX and DX-based skills.

Gear: Glock-17; AMT backup in concealed ankle holster; Baton; Heavy Flashlight; Small switchblade knife; Tear gas spray; Second Chance Standard vest; Leather jacket; Boots; Swiss Army Knife; Handcuffs; Police radio. Police car contains Remington Model 870 shotgun; Police Riot Helmet; Police Riot Shield; First Aid Kit; other equipment. Shotgun, first aid kit, S.C.A. weapons and armor, etc., at home or in own car.

Appearance: 28 years old; Razor-cut dark brown hair, small moustache, tanned complexion, blue eyes; 5'11", 160 lbs. When not in uniform, wears leather jacket, blue shirt and pants, sunglasses, and boots.

Harry Kosminski is a third generation cop, and it's never occurred to him to become anything else. Most of the time, he's reasonably honest -- he's careful not to be caught doing anything that might bring the department into disrepute, and gives value for money when bribed -- but he's slightly more ambitious than most of his family, with dreams of taking control of a large part of Houston's sex industry. He's reluctant to involve his fellow cops too heavily in these plans, but not averse to using police cars and equipment in his extra-curricular activities. He's always heavily armed,

usually armored, and uses the police computers to keep track of any opponents. He can also find criminals for hire if he needs other services performed.

Campaign uses: Harry is not an enemy to be brushed aside lightly; if killed or injured, he will be avenged by his fellow cops, unless the PCs also manage to find evidence of his corruption. Alternatively, Harry might be a useful police contact for the PCs, or even an ally: PCs caught in illegal activity may well prefer to be arrested by an ambitious crooked cop than an honest one. At different stages of his career, he may be encountered as a detective, behind the desk at the evidence storeroom, or anywhere else he can be useful/dangerous to the PCs.

Other settings: Harry's essentially identical relatives may be found in most large cities in the US and elsewhere, and in most eras since the Roaring 20s or even earlier. He can be adapted to other times with only minor changes (such as replacing Computer Operations with Intimidation), and may well survive into the far future.

Dr. Byron "Benny" Factor, Underworld Doctor

ST: 9 [-10] **Basic Damage** Thrust: 1d-2 Swing: 1d-1

DX: 11 [10] Dodge: 5 Parry: n/a Block: n/a

IQ: 13 [30] Basic Speed: 5.25 Move: 5

HT: 10 [0]

Advantages: Contact (Street, skill-15, available on a 9 or less, somewhat reliable) [2]; Reputation (+2; small group of people, recognised on 10 or less) [2]; Wealth (Comfortable) [10].

Disadvantages: Callous [-6]; Overweight [-5]; Reputation (-2; small group of people, recognized on 12 or less); Secret [-20]; Weak Will -1 [-8].

Quirks: Mild lecherousness; Enjoys the company of criminals; Dislikes being called "Benny," but will tolerate it from people he fears; Fascinated by tattoos and skin diseases; Collects more videos than he has time to watch.

Skills: Area Knowledge (LA)-13 [1]; Artist-10 [1/2]; Diagnosis/TL7-11 [1]; Disguise/TL7-13 [2]; Driving/TL7 (Car)-9 [1/2]; Fast-Talk-12 [1]; Language (English)-13 [0], (Latin)-11 [1/2]; Merchant-13 [2]; Physician/TL7-14 [8]; Psychology/TL7-11 [1]; Streetwise-12 [1]; Surgery/TL7 (Cosmetic Surgery)-18 [8], (other surgery)-12 [0]; Tattooing-11 [1/2].

75-point version: Add +1 to IQ (and IQ-based skills) and +2 to DX (and DX-based skills); increase Wealth to Wealthy; remove Overweight.

Gear: Surgery; good clothing and shoes; sports car; doctor's black bag (in car).

Appearance: 31 years old; Light brown hair, pale complexion, brown eyes; 5' 9", 195 lbs.

As a young man, Byron Factor was studious, plump, respectable, and unadventurous, though addicted to cinematic sex and violence. His parents sent him to medical school expecting him to become a dermatologist, but away from their influence, he decided to specialize in plastic surgery, and by the time he turned thirty, he had reduced the noses and inflated the breasts of more than a hundred wannabe starlets, as well as writing false prescriptions for many. When one of his patients died in his bed, he panicked, and asked his street contact to help him dispose of the body.

Since that night, Byron Factor has secretly done a lot of work for local criminals to pay off this debt, which he thinks of as "an agreement" rather than "blackmail." He's known to well-connected crooks as a good plastic surgeon and competent medic who doesn't ask embarrassing questions; among LA's medical establishment, he's known as a sell-out and widely suspected of criminal activity (though he's never been charged or even openly accused).

Campaign uses: Dr Factor can provide discreet medical care to PCs who live outside the law, invaluable inside information to crimefighters (if interrogated successfully), or help keep a PC's other enemies alive.

Other settings: Criminals have used surgery in the hopes of concealing their identities since the 1920s, and may continue to do so for centuries to come.

Daisuke the Wolf, Bandit

ST: 13 [30] **Basic Damage** Thrust: 1d Swing: 2d-1
DX: 12 [20] Dodge: 5 Parry: 7 (Axe/Mace) Block: n/a
IQ: 9 [-10] Basic Speed: 5.5 Move: 5
HT: 10 [0]

Advantages: Rapid Healing [5]; Fearlessness/2 [4].

Disadvantages: Berserk [-15]; Bully [-10]; Code of Honor (Pirate's) [-5]; Poverty (Struggling) [-10].

Quirks: Hates farming; Enjoys watching fish and birds; Incompetence (Navigation); Always keeps at least one weapon within reach, even when sleeping or bathing; Mild phobia (cats).

Skills: Axe/Mace-14 [8]; Bow-10 [1]; Climbing-10 [1/2]; Gambling-7 [1/2]; Intimidation-8 [0]; Judo-10 [1]; Karate-10 [1]; Language (Japanese)-9 [0]; Polearm-12 [2]; Riding (Horse)-10 [1/2]; Running-8 [1/2]; Shortsword-11 [1]; Stealth-10 [1/2]; Survival (Mountains)-8 [1]; Swimming-11 [1/2].

Maneuvers: Arm Lock-12 [1]; Disarming-11 [1].

75-point version: Add Combat Reflexes, High Pain Threshold, +1 to IQ and IQ-based skills, +1 to ST.

Gear: Naginata; Kama; Leather do (corselet); Old padded cotton kimono; wooden sandals; straw hat; belt pouch containing personal basics; dice and dice cup.

Appearance: 28 years old. Long face with pointy jaw and long nose; dark grey hair, cut short with knife; tanned complexion; brown eyes; tattoo of wolf on right arm, long scar on neck; 5'7", 135 lbs.

The third son of a peasant farmer, Daisuke grew up during the Warring Provinces era. He received some training as a foot soldier, and has seen combat -- always from the losing side, which rather spoiled his taste for the soldier's life. When his lord's army was routed and disbanded and his family killed, Daisuke joined a pack of bandits led by masterless samurai. His nickname comes from his long face and prematurely gray hair, as well as his ferocity.

Daisuke enjoys melee, but rarely uses ranged weapons, for fear that he might go berserk and attack his own allies.

Campaign uses: Daisuke may be encountered as a bandit, a bodyguard, a sentry, or in the obligatory tavern brawl. He rarely works alone, but usually makes up the brawn part of a brains-and-brawn team.

Other settings: With a different name and gear and other minor changes, Daisuke might be reincarnated anywhere -- especially in settings where guns and/or ammunition are difficult to obtain, but muscle is still effective. To change him into a medieval European brigand, replace Judo, Karate and his maneuvers with Brawling and Knife; to adapt him to a high tech world, replace Bow with Guns (Pistol or Shotgun) or Beam Weapon (Blaster), and Riding with Driving or Motorcycle.

Fritz, Henchman

ST: 15 [45] **Basic Damage** Thrust: 1d+1 Swing: 2d+2
DX: 11 [10] Dodge: 6 Parry: 8 (Brawling) Block: n/a
IQ: 8 [0] Basic Speed: 6.25 Move: 6
HT: 14/19 [45]

Disadvantages: Hunchback [-10]. **Zombie Advantages:** Doesn't Breathe [20]; Doesn't Eat or Drink [10]; Extra Hit Points +5 [25]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Immunity to Disease [10]; Immunity to Poison [15]; Injury Tolerance (No Blood) [5]; Invulnerability (Mind Control) [75]; Single-Minded [5]; ST +1 [10]; Temperature Tolerance/10 [10]; Unaging [15]; Unfazeable [15]. **Zombie Disadvantages:** Bad Smell [-10]; Cannot Learn [-30]; Dead Broke [-25]; Disturbing Voice [-10]; Eunuch [-5]; Hidebound [-5]; IQ -2 [-15]; Low Empathy [-15]; Monstrous Appearance [-25]; No Sense of Humor [-10]; No Sense of Smell/Taste [-5]; Obdurate [-10]; Reprogrammable Duty [-25]; Slave Mentality [-40]; Social Stigma (Dead) [-20]; Unhealing [-30]; Unliving [-50].

Skills: Axe/Mace-12 [4]; Brawling-13 [4]; Driving/TL7-9 [1/2]; Intimidation-10 [0]; Knife-12 [2]; Language (English)-8 [0]; Lifting-13 [1]; Stealth-11 [2]; Thrown Weapon (Axe)-12 [2].

Maneuvers: Neck Snap-13 [2].

75-point version: Add Independent Body Parts advantage (p. UD59), and +1 to HT.

Gear: Remington Model 870 Shotgun; Throwing Axe; Large Knife; Leather jacket; jeans; shirt; Boots.

Appearance: Greenish-grey complexion; shaggy white hair; amber eyes; huge hands and feet; 5'8", 180 lbs.

Fritz was the favorite henchman of mad scientist Dr Theodore Munro, whose atrocities including maiming suspected mutants to see what powers they would come up with to compensate. When Munro's lab was discovered and attacked by a super-team in 1940, Fritz hid in an airtight radiation chamber. The chamber was buried when the lab was destroyed, and when Theodore Munro, Jr. located it ten years later, the hunchback's corpse had barely decayed. After some experimentation, Munro Jr. was able to revive his father's assistant, and put him to work. While he did mostly menial tasks around the lab, Fritz's specialty was stealing bodies -- dead or alive, according to demand.

Munro Jr. required expensive equipment and chemicals for his experiments, and was soon deeply in debt to his black market suppliers. Fritz managed to keep most debt collectors at bay, but one was impressed enough by the hideous creature that he offered to hire him. Since then, Fritz has spent at least one night a week as a debt collector for loan sharks, taken part in several armed robberies and hijackings, and played bit parts in a few horror films.

Campaign uses: Fritz may be sent to kill, kidnap or frighten a PC, or one of their allies or dependents. He may also be encountered as a sentry at a mad scientist's secret lab or a crime boss's fortress, or be ordered to guard the PCs when they've been captured. (He's an extremely good sentry, able to stand guard almost indefinitely without needing food, sleep, or a power pack recharge.) He's rarely used as a bodyguard, however -- few people are willing to put up with the smell.

Fritz will not become an enemy of his own volition -- he doesn't have any -- but he may be used to replace an enemy who the PCs have killed, as he will not let the death of his master prevent him carrying out his orders.

Other settings: Fritz is designed for use in a Cliffhangers, Atomic Horror, or Supers campaign, but he can appear in any setting where weird science is appropriate. To create zombie henchmen for fantasy or secret war campaigns, see GURPS Undead.

James 'Little Jim' Athy, Bank robber

ST: 9 [-10] **Basic Damage** Thrust: 1d-2 Swing: 1d-1

DX: 13 [30] Dodge: 7 Parry: n/a Block: n/a

IQ: 10 [0] Basic Speed: 6 Move: 6

HT: 11 [10]

Advantages: Combat Reflexes [15]; Reputation (+2 to dime novel writers, yellow journalists, and anyone who hates the police and banks; recognized on 7 or less) [2].

Disadvantages: Bad Temper [-10]; Bloodlust [-10]; Low Pain Threshold [-10]; Overconfidence [-10]; Reputation (-2 to law enforcement and potential victims; recognized on 7 or less) [2].

Quirks: Mild phobia (snakes); Touchy about his small size; Likes spicy food and Mexican girls; Names his guns after his old girlfriends; Horrible hangovers.

Skills: Animal Handling-8 [1]; Area Knowledge (New Mexico)-9 [1/2]; Climbing-11 [1/2]; Cooking-9 [1]; Escape-10 [1/2]; Fast-Draw (Pistol)-15 [2], (Shotgun)-13 [1/2]; Filch-11 [1/2]; Guns/TL5 (Pistol)-17 [8], (Shotgun)-14 [1/2], (other)-13 [0]; Holdout-9 [1]; Intimidation-11 [4]; Lasso/Riata-11 [1/2]; Language (English)-10 [0], (Spanish)-8 [1/2]; Riding (Horse)-13 [2]; Running-8 [1/2]; Sex-Appeal-9 [1/2]; Stealth-11 [1/2]; Survival (Desert)-8 [1/2].

75-point version: Add +1 to IQ and IQ-based skills, +1 to DX and DX-based skills, replace Low Pain Threshold with Skinny, add Ally Group (small, appears on 12 or less).

Gear: Colt Lightning in Kansas Loop holster; Double-barrel 20-gauge shotgun; Pony; Linen Duster, shirt, Levis, vest, bandana, Stetson, cowboy boots with fancy spurs; personal basics.

Appearance: 19 years old; Tanned complexion; strawberry blond hair; blue eyes; 5'7", 130 lbs.

James Athy grew up in New York's notorious Five Points district after the Civil War. Short, scrawny and thin-skinned, he was easy prey for neighborhood bullies until a gang leader recruited him as a runner. Athy's life changed forever when he was given a .22 pistol and discovered that he was a better shot than any of his enemies. One month, five

murders and a robbery later, the 16-year-old Athy fled to New Mexico, where he became a cook on a ranch until he shot a cowboy who laughed at his accent. Another rancher bailed him out of jail and recruited him to fight in a vicious county war. When the war ended, Athy and two friends rode to a nearby county, and after spending the last of their money, robbed the bank. Reports of his skill with a gun spread, and soon bad likenesses of his face were appearing in newspapers and on Wanted posters.

Campaign uses: Athy would make a good enemy for a gunslinger in an Old West campaign, an ally for an outlaw, and a quarry for deputies and bounty hunters. He may also be hired to kill a PC who gets in the way of a wealthy cattle baron. Athy is often overconfident, and unlike most gunmen of the time, he prefers to challenge his enemies to fast-draw competitions rather than shooting them in the back -- but he's not stupid or suicidal.

Other settings: With very minor changes (Driving instead of Riding, an FN HP-35 instead of a Colt Lightning, etc.), Athy could resume robbing banks in a GURPS Cliffhangers game and get the same sort of press coverage and mixed reactions. After the 1970s, when bank security improved, he would have to lower his sights to convenience stores and other easy targets, and his reputation would probably suffer -- but he might still become glorified by yellow journalists, as in the movie *Natural Born Killers*. He might also work as a hired gun in most TL5+ settings, and because of his low pain threshold and lack of unarmed combat skills, will do almost anything to stay out of jail.

Kiet, kickboxer

ST: 11 [10] **Basic Damage** Thrust: 1d-1 Swing: 1d+1

DX: 13 [30] Dodge: 7 Parry: 8 Block: n/a

IQ: 9 [-10] Basic Speed: 6 Move: 6

HT: 11 [10]

Advantages: Toughness 1 [10].

Disadvantages: Poverty (Poor) [-15]; Proud [-1]; Status -1 [-5]; Unattractive [-5]; Youth/1 (17 years old) [-2].

Quirks: Believes everything his sister tells him; Secretly likes country and western music; Mild phobia (snakes); Refuses to beg, and steals only from foreigners; Distrusts cops, soldiers and blonds.

Skills: Boxing-12 [1]; Filch-11 [1/2] Karate-12 [2]; Knife-12 [1/2]; Language (Thai)-9 [0]; Motorcycle/TL7-12 [1/2]; Running-9 [1/2]; Survival (Urban)-8 [1].

Maneuvers: Axe Kick-11 [1]; Back Kick-11 [1]; Elbow Strike-11 [1/2]; Hit Location (Karate)-11 [2]; Hook Kick-12 [1]; Jab-10 [1/2]; Jump Kick-11 [1]; Kicking-12 [2]; Knee Strike-12 [1]; Riposte [Karate]-9 [1]; Roundhouse Punch-10 [1/2]; Shin Kick-12 [1]; Spin Kick-12 [1]; Spinning Punch-11 [1].

75-point version: Add High Pain Threshold, +2 to ST; increase Boxing to 14 [4], Karate to 15 [16], and Survival (Urban) to 9 [2].

Gear: Old leather jacket, ragged jeans and T-shirt, hard shoes (+1 to kicking damage).

Appearance: 17 years old, but looks older because of battered face; dark golden skin, black hair, dark eyes; 5'7", 140 lbs.

Kiet grew up in Thailand's Golden Triangle, but was sent to Bangkok by his family when they could no longer afford to feed both him and his father's heroin habit. He found his sister Sunee, also an addict, working in a brothel; her pimp and supplier, noticing that Kiet was tough, quick, and not particularly bright, decided that he had potential as a kickboxer. The pimp, acting as his manager, paid for his training, gambled on him, kept most of his meagre winnings, and occasionally employed him as a courier and bouncer.

Campaign uses: Kiet may be an opponent for PCs in a full-contact martial arts contest, a member of a street gang, or a bouncer in a seedy nightclub. He may also come to the rescue of a woman or a fellow street kid if he thinks the PCs are harassing them -- or lend aid to a female, Asian or obviously poor PC. In a Supers campaign, he may be a wannabe superhero sidekick.

Other settings: A young tough like Kiet, who sees martial arts as a means of leaving the streets, might be encountered in the poor parts of many towns. While Muay Thai was not well known in the USA before the 1970s, he would be well suited to any modern day, *Cyberpunk*, *Autoduel* or *Space* campaign.

Lisa Parkes, Criminal Lawyer

ST: 8 [-15] **Basic Damage** Thrust: 1d-3 Swing: 1d-2
DX: 10 [0] Dodge: n/a Parry: n/a Block: n/a
IQ: 14 [45] Basic Speed: 4.75 Move: 2 (in wheelchair)
HT: 9 [-10]

Advantages: Beautiful; Contact (Street, skill-15, available on a 9 or less, somewhat reliable) [2]; Contact (Police, skill-12, available on a 6 or less, usually reliable) [1]; Contact (Business, skill-15, available on a 6 or less, somewhat reliable) [1]; Reputation (+3; large group of people, always recognized) [5]; Voice [10].

Disadvantages: Bad Sight (Nearsighted, wears contacts or glasses) [-10]; Paraplegic [-35]; Reputation (-3; large group of people, always recognized). [-5].

Quirks: Won't defend rapists or child abusers; Doesn't use drugs, and rarely drinks alcohol; Prefers vegetarian food; Likes wearing the shortest skirts she can get away with; Closet science fiction fan.

Skills: Administration-12 [1/2]; Area Knowledge (San Francisco)-13 [1/2]; Bard-14 [1/2]; Computer Operations/TL7-13 [1/2]; Detect Lies-9 [0]; Diplomacy-15 [2]; Fast-Talk-12 [1/2]; Forensics/TL7-11 [1/2]; Guns/TL7-11 [1/2]; Interrogation-12 [1/2]; Language (English)-14 [0], (Latin)-12 [1/2]; Law-16 [8]; Psychology/TL7-13 [2]; Research-13 [1]; Savoir-Faire-15 [1/2]; Sex-Appeal-11 [2]; Streetwise-12 [1/2]; Swimming-8 [1/2]

75-point version: Increase Wealth to Comfortable; add Eidetic Memory (30 points, and increase IQ-based skills accordingly), Charisma/1 and Status/1.

Gear: Wheelchair; laptop computer; mobile phone; AMT backup in concealed holster.

Appearance: 28 years old; Long auburn hair; pale complexion; green eyes; shapely legs; 5'5", 125 lbs.

Lisa Parkes was already cynical about the legal process when she started law school, but she became truly bitter after seeing the wealthy drunk driver who'd killed her date and left her confined to a wheelchair, get away with a suspended sentence and fine. Convinced that the law existed to protect the rich, so she decided to become rich. Specializing in personal injury lawsuits, she was so skilled at manipulating juries that she was invited to join a team of lawyers defending a millionaire accused of murder. Since then, she's defended many high-profile criminal cases; she's expensive, but she rarely loses. Criminals who can afford her services react to her at +3; prosecutors and cops, at -3.

Campaign uses: Lisa Parkes may frustrate the PCs' attempts to put criminals in jail, and might make regular appearances in a Supers campaign. Less law-abiding PCs may need her services themselves. Lisa could even be a minor criminal mastermind, sending her former clients out to perform crimes so they can pay for her skills, or to dispose of inconvenient witnesses or jurors.

Other settings: A wheelchair-bound female lawyer is best suited to modern-day campaigns; a male version (most probably a disabled war veteran) might be encountered as early as the Old West, though he would be less effective with the all-male juries common until more recent times. In an ultra-tech setting where paraplegia can be cured with bionics or transplanting cloned parts, Lisa would need another obvious disadvantage to elicit pity from juries, such as a Weak Immune System acquired from medical malpractice.

Sam Gacy, Gumshoe

ST: 10 [0] **Basic Damage** Thrust: 1d-2 Swing: 1d
DX: 11 [10] Dodge: 5 Parry: n/a Block: n/a
IQ: 11 [10] Basic Speed: 5.25 Move: 5
HT: 10 [0]

Advantages: Alertness +1 [5]; Contacts (Street, skill-15, available on a 9 or less, somewhat reliable) [2], (Police, skill-12, available on a 12 or less, usually reliable) [4].

Disadvantages: Curious [-5]; Post-Combat Shakes [-5]; Poverty (Struggling) [-10]; Unluckiness [-10].

Quirks: Shy around women; Hates loud noises; Talks (softly) to cats; Doesn't smoke or drink; Reads pulp magazines

in the office, but Shakespeare and poetry at home.

Skills: Acting-10 [1]; Administration-10 [1]; Area Knowledge (Chicago)-12 [2]; Astronomy/TL6-8 [1/2]; Cooking-10 [1/2]; Climbing-10 [1]; Disguise-10 [1]; Driving/TL6 (Car)-11 [2]; Fast-Talk-12 [1]; Guns/TL6 (Pistol)-12 [1]; Holdout-10 [1]; Language (English)-11 [0]; Literature-9 [1/2]; Photography/TL6-11 [2]; Running-8 [1/2]; Scrounging-10 [1/2]; Shadowing-14 [8]; Stealth-12 [4]; Streetwise-11 [2]; Survival (Urban)-9 [1/2].

75-point version: Remove Unluckiness; add Eidetic Memory (30 points; increase IQ-based skills accordingly) and Night Vision.

Gear: S&W M10, Camera and binoculars, all kept in briefcase or in car (dark gray Ford Model A). Wears overcoat (reversible), gray suit, shoes (with soft soles, +1 to Stealth when trying to move silently), and hat.

Appearance: 38 years old. Brown hair, cut short; brown eyes; 5'9, 150 lbs.

A man of extremely average appearance and little ambition, Sam Gacy has often been described as a born follower. After returning from France at the end of the Great War, he found a quiet job in a film processing workshop in Chicago, spending his lunch breaks and evenings walking around and taking photos. He might have kept up this routine for the rest of his life if the workshop hadn't closed after the stock market crash, leaving Sam unemployed.

Fortunately for Sam, a P.I. who'd noticed his eccentric habits hired him to do some legwork, and Sam soon became accomplished at shadowing people and photographing them unawares. He rarely cares who, or why, as long as he can afford to pay the rent and live in peace.

Campaign uses: Sam can help a PC by tailing his enemies, or vice versa.

Other settings: A character like Sam could survive in almost any large city at almost any time. Before 1919, replace Driving and Photography with other useful Thief/Spy skills, such as Pickpocket or Starglazing. By 2000, Sam would be carrying a cellphone and a digital camcorder, but his (or her) car and gun will still be the most inconspicuous available. In later eras, he might equip himself with Nightshades (p. UT121) and a Varicloth suit (p. UT60), but the basic character will still be the same.

Tori Adore, Armed Robber

ST: 10 [0] **Basic Damage** Thrust: 1d-2 Swing: 1d

DX: 11 [10] Dodge: 5 Parry: 6 Block: n/a

IQ: 10 [0] Basic Speed: 5.5 Move: 5

HT: 11 [10]

Advantages: Attractive; Contact (Street, skill-12, available on a 12 or less, somewhat reliable) [2]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Reputation (+2; large group of people, recognised on 10 or less) [2].

Disadvantages: Addiction (Cocaine) [-15]; Compulsive Carousing [-5]; Compulsive Spending [-5]; Greed [-15]; Reputation (-2; large group of people, recognized on 10 or less).

Quirks: Alcohol intolerance; Doesn't trust or respect men; Collects teddy bears and gold; Dislikes silence; Always wears at least one cross.

Skills: Acting-9 [1]; Area Knowledge (USA)-11 [2]; Brawling-11 [1]; Dancing-9 [1/2]; Disguise-10 [2]; Driving/TL7 (Car)-9 [1/2]; Fast-Talk-10 [2]; Filch-10 [1]; Guns/TL7 (Pistol)-12 [1]; Holdout-10 [2]; Intimidation-10 [2]; Judo-10 [2]; Language (English)-10 [0], (Spanish)-8 [1/2]; Merchant-11 [4]; Savoir-Faire-9 [1/2]; Sex-Appeal-13 [6]; Stealth-10 [1]; Streetwise-10 [2]; Survival (Urban)-9 [1/2]; Video Production/TL7-9 [1/2].

Maneuvers: Knee Strike-12 [1].

75-point version: Add +1 to DX (and DX-based skills), and +1 to HT (and HT-based skills); increase Appearance to Beautiful and Wealth to Comfortable, and add Voice.

Gear: Handbag contains AMT Backup, handcuffs, tear gas pen, hand stunner (pp. HT 100-101), Swiss Army knife, wig, camera, a change of underwear, assorted sex toys, cosmetics, and other personal basics. Usually wears respectable middle-class clothes, expensive lingerie, high-heeled shoes or boots, and a wig.

Appearance: 26 years old; black hair, olive complexion, dark brown eyes; 5' 6, 125 lbs.

Like too many teenage girls, Rosa Valdez ran away to LA in search of her fortune. She went from stripping and lap-

dancing to appearing in adult films under the name "Tori Adore," becoming mildly notorious (+2 from fans of X-rated videos; -2 from anti-porn campaigners, her victims, and other strippers who know about her sideline). She was soon being paid handsomely to travel the US as a feature dancer at clubs, but spent the money as fast as she made it. Using the internet and her reputation, she began setting up 'dates' with wealthy businessmen in hotels near the airport on her last night in a city; after having sex with these men, she would then steal their wallets and trousers and any other valuables -- sometimes stealthily while they sleep, sometimes at gunpoint, sometimes by handcuffing them to the furniture, sometimes by disabling them with tear gas or the stungun -- and photograph them, then be on a plane before they could catch her. Because of the photos and the potential humiliation, none of her victims has ever gone to the police. Sometimes her contact will help her select a particularly profitable victim (or away from a dangerous one), but she prefers to act on instinct.

Campaign uses: Tori is basically a thief, though she will fight - possibly even kill -- if the reward is great enough. She is most likely to enter a campaign by stealing something that the PCs will have to recover (a patron's address book, keys to a secret base, a superhero costume hidden in a belt-buckle, etc.) as discreetly as possible.

Other settings: Sex has been used to lure men into being robbed and/or blackmailed for centuries. An earlier version of Tori would probably need a male accomplice (someone like Daisuke would do nicely), but few other changes. A TL8+ version would have the Extreme Sexual Dimorphism bio-mod (p. BIO62; reduce Holdout and Fast-Talk by one point each) and possibly other modifications such as Stingers and a Flesh Holster (p. UT68-70).

Pyramid Review

Veil of Night (for Vampire: The Dark Ages)

Published by [White Wolf Game Studio](#)



Written by **Chris Harford, Ellen Kiley, James Kiley, Michael Lee, Sarah Roark, Lucien Soulban, and Adam Tinworth**

\$29.95

Let me start off by saying I don't think I can approach this book with the lack of bias that no one really expects from reviewers anymore. My background is from the region it covers (Northern Africa and Western Asia, generally termed the Middle East), so I'll probably cheer for any book that portrays the region as more than a radioactive wasteland (ala *Cyberpunk 2020*).

This year I've got a lot to cheer about, thanks to White Wolf making it the Year of the Scarab. Like the Year of the Lotus before it, the YotS books will focus on a specific region; this time Araby instead of the Orient. The first book of the series was the dissapointing *Mummy: the Ressurrection*, and there will be more books for the various White Wolf games.

Veil of Night is the YotS sourcebook for *Vampire: the Dark Ages*. It gives readers a quick tour of the Near East and Northern Africa, from Moorish Spain to Persia & Pakistan.

The book begins with an encounter with Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam and a vampire (presumably, Suleiman Ibn Abdullah, the founder of the Isharra sect of vampires & a major player in this book). The encounter was well done and respectful, and shouldn't offend.

The theme of the book is the effect that Islam has had on the vampires of the Middle East; it's had just as strong, if not a stronger, impact on Arabia's Kindred as Christianity has had on the vampires of Europe. The book's primary purpose is to expand on the Ashirra (originally introduced in *World of Darkness 2nd Edition*). The Islamic precept of submission to Allah leading to redemption meshes nicely with *Vampire's* core theme of the vampire's struggle to control or come to terms with their inner beast.

The history chapter describes the evolution of Islam, and how it spread across Arabia and Africa. I'm not an expert on the region, but it seems to hew to the real world history, while inserting the requisite vampires. The geography section does a good job of laying out the state of the various Islamic states, and their vampiric inhabitants. Each of the major cities on the route followed are described; the reader gets more atmosphere than hard facts, although a few citizens of each city are described.

The appendix to the geography section goes into the characters a bit more. My only quibble is with this section's art; it seems somewhat uneven, and none of the pieces stand out.

Following that, it's into the meat and potatoes of the game. We're given a listing of what the Arabic names for the various clans are (and they become familiar surprisingly fast), and how they're different from their European counterparts; for example, the Toreador, or Ray'een Al-Fen, hew away from representational art, and instead are focussed towards poetry, music, and architecture. The Setites and Assamites, as might be expected, are more prevelant in this setting than in the main *Dark Ages* one.

Interestingly enough, the three clans not represented strongly in Arabia are the Ventrue, the Tremere, and the Tzimisce. These clans, along with all other non-Ashirra vampires, are referred to as Franj.

The roads that vampires follow are detailed, each of them altered slightly to fit in better with the setting. Following this are rules on character generation. There are guidelines for naming your character and developing their backgrounds. The background ideas first came to my attention in *Blood and Silk* (the sourcebook for East Asian vampires in *Vampire: the Dark Ages*), and they're very good, particularly when PCs are going to be from a society the players won't be familiar with, like the Dark Ages era games (specifically the non European parts).

Skills are gone over, but there's one area where a change seems somewhat strange; Linguistics seems to have stepped back from more languages at higher levels to X extra languages, where x = the number of dots you have in the knowledge. This is easy enough to circumvent, but it just seems like a strange step back.

The book finishes with a short citybook on Damascus; since Jerusalem & Constantinople have already been covered in citybooks, it makes sense, although I might have preferred to see the space go to Cairo or Baghdad. Damascus is an interesting city, with plenty of plots and plans afoot from both the Franj and Ashirra.

There is a short appendix on antagonists to be found in Arabia; this is mostly stuff on common beasts (Werebeasts, Ghosts, Mages, and Vampire hunters), and a short section on Djinn. Most of these sections have concluding sentences directing you to the relevant books.

One thing I've noticed is that the Baali are being developed as a threat in the *Dark Ages* setting, especially in this setting. Their Demon Worshipping aspect is a bit over the top for the current regime of *Vampire*, but they work well in the *Dark Ages* setting.

The lives of Arabic vampires is well defined in this book, as are their responsibilities to each other. Everyday lives of people in the Middle East are slightly less well detailed, although the bibliography contains a good selection of books & websites.

Overall the book was satisfying. with the book. I'm glad that WW is doing The Year of the Scarab, since it will hopefully answer a lot of questions I've had about the World of Darkness. For its part, *Veil of Night* does an excellent job of covering the Medieval Middle East.

--Justin Mohareb

Pyramid Review

Defenders of the Faith (for Dungeons & Dragons)

Published by [Wizards of the Coast](#)



Written by Rich Redman and James Wyatt

96 b&w pages; \$19.95

The next class splat book for *Dungeons and Dragons*, following *Sword & Fist*, *Defenders of the Faith* augments the cleric and paladin classes with new feats, prestige classes, and organizations.

Broken up into four chapters, *Defenders of the Faith* starts with Cleric and Paladins, brief guides to how to effectively role (and roll) play these characters. The advice is useful, but rarely goes beyond the basics information. One of the most interesting areas though, is the section on special mounts for paladins. The most desired mount of course, is a dragon. Methods to acquire dragons, keep them, and when to let them go, is covered.

The chapter rounds out with new uses for old skills, new skills, new feats, equipment, and magic items. These are all "candy" and their mileage will vary depending on your campaign.

The new feats include general feats -- like shield charge and improved shield bash -- and divine feats. These divine feats are interesting in that they use a turn/rebuke undead attempt to power them. Divine feats include Divine Might, increasing the damage you inflict by adding your charisma bonus to your damage roll, or divine resistance, where you grant your allies resistance to elemental based attacks.

The metamagic feats, extra smiting, extra turning, empower turning, heightened turning, and quicken turning are all pretty simply and can be very useful for games that are heavily involved with undead.

The new equipment, sacred gear, consists simply of non-magical items like prayer books, incenses, candles, and censers. This is nothing special, but useful to have prices and weights for them. The real question is will this information be in the forthcoming *Master Tools* software or is it something that'll have to be manually added?

The magic items are broken up into categories: armor and shield, weapons, rods, and wondrous items. There are over thirty items described here, the majority falling under armor and wondrous items. Some, like Energy Drain, can be quite powerful, while others, like the black patch -- an eye patch for half or full-blooded orcs -- are very specific in their use.

Chapter two, churches and organizations, has generic information on churches based on alignment, as well as specific churches. The generic information is truly generic. "Neutral good churches are less interested in organization than they are in doing good." (I guess that would follow since their alignment is neutral good.) The useful part of this chapter is the various temples, fully mapped out. None of these temples are huge or earth shaking, but they are quite useful for quickly inserting them into campaigns. Churches of Pelor, Wee Jas, and Erythnul are all mapped out. In addition, there are several organizations for paladins and clerics to join, like the Justice Blade (a collection of paladins) and the House of Death (an organization that hunts the undead). The House of Death has a typical house mapped out. Other organizations include the Council of Blades, the Laughing Knives, Order of the Chalice, and the Stargazers (who also have a mapped out temple, the Mount Baden Chapter house).

The chapter closes out with information about how temples are run, how they charge for services, what type of services they provide, and what types of clerical duties are expected from them. Unfortunately, it doesn't go into a lot

of detail. For example, are there any cases where a lawful good church won't use an ability like raise dead? And if so, what happens with funds gained for expensive spells? It wouldn't take long for millions of gold pieces to pile up through spell use. What happens to that money?

The meat of the chapter for many players is chapter three, prestige classes. Here, classes range from church inquisitors, who hunt corruption within the church, to the knight of the chalice, an order devoted to fighting demons. Unfortunately for those wanting entirely new material, the Hunter of the Dead (from *Dragon Magazine*) is reprinted here. The prestige classes give a good range from paladin, knightly based ones, to clerical healers and secular clerics.

Chapter four, divine magic, lists new spells for clerics, paladins, druids, and rangers. The spells can help fill some gaps in the core rule. The spells are broken up by class, level, and alphabetized by name. The nice thing about this is that there is a brief description of what the spells do. The actual spell descriptions are all alphabetized by name. These spells almost put a cleric on equal ground with a wizard. For example, Curse of the Brute allows you to augment a physical stat by +1 per level, with a penalty to Intelligence and Charisma equal to the bonus. Still, how many fighters won't take a +5 bonus to Strength for a brief penalty? Divine Agility gives a wide number of bonuses to Reflex save and Dexterity, as well as the Feat Spring Attack.

One of the most interesting things about the new spells are the new prestige domains. These domains cannot be taken by starting characters, but only when the character enters certain prestige classes. This is an interesting concept, with domains like Beastmaster, Creation, Exorcism, Glory, Inquisition, Madness, Mind, Mysticism, Pestilence and Summoning rounding out the idea. Each domain lists the deity that has the domain, granted powers, and domain spells from 1st to 9th level.

The book ends with the Appendix: Monstrous Clerics. Here, the gods of various monsters are listed in alphabetical order. Many of these should be familiar to readers of earlier editions like Gruumsh, the Great Mother of the Beholders, and Vaparak. Each has a brief description, domains, and favorite weapon.

The book follows the standard from *Wizards of the Coast*: two columns, broken up by art and maps. Dennis Cramer from *Sword and Fist* does the art, so if you liked *S&W*, you'll enjoy *Defenders of the Faith*.

The book is useful for those who wish to expand the cleric and paladin classes, but doesn't do enough. For example, there are no new spell casting methods, such as those introduced in the old *Player's Option Spells and Magic* book. There are no new standard classes, just as in *Sword & Fist*. There are no new weapons or armor designed for these classes. Sure, the book isn't covering fighters, but these classes are still the front-runners of every combat they're involved in. In addition, the book doesn't give enough details on the role of religion in a fantasy setting, nor describe in detail the ordeals paladins must go through to gain their power.

Despite these problems, the book does offer lots of different options that can be plopped down into almost any campaign with some tinkering and if clerics and paladins play a large role in your campaign, the \$19.95 isn't so bad.

--Joe G. Kushner

Pyramid Pick

Pyramid Pick: Rune RPG

Rune RPG

Published by [Atlas Games](#)

Written by Robin D. Laws, based on the computer game from Human Head Studios



Illustrations by Tim Bowman, Shane Gurno, Scott Reeves, Ross Bonilla, Jeff DeWitt, Ted Halsted and Gene Marshal

256 page hardcover; \$27.95

*Old Runner: Your words mark you as a true Viking. You shall bear the mighty axe of **Rune**!*

New Runner: With honor I shall wield it!

Everybody: URGH! URGH! URGH! VIKINGS! URRRRRRGH!

-- The "Axe Ritual," recommended for changing gamemasters.

Horned helmets, rotating gamemasters, competitive play -- if shameless anachronism and offbeat game mechanics excite you, then **Rune** is your roleplaying game.

It is not, however, the roleplaying game you're used to seeing. In Robin D. Laws' words, "**Rune** cruelly smashes down the simple distinctions found in other RPGs, leaving them in a bloodied heap on the longhouse floor." That's no idle boast. This game gleefully tosses characterization, plot, and cooperative problem solving into the fjord, then rampages through the Underworld with bloody axes held high. Even hardened hack-and-slashers may be taken a bit aback.

Rune is cleverer than it pretends to be, though. The cooperative play element isn't really gone, for instance -- it's just been shifted to a different part of the game.

The basic system is derived from *Ars Magica*, also published by Atlas Games. Heroes have eight Characteristics -- Strength, Stamina, Dexterity, Quickness, Intelligence, Perception, Presence and Communication -- and a variety of primary and secondary Abilities. Most of the primary Abilities are fighting skills and other often-used tricks like "Dodge" or "Healer"; secondary Abilities include skiing, sleeping, leadership, and music. To succeed in a task, a player tries to beat a set Difficulty number by rolling a 10-sided die and adding it to the appropriate Characteristic and Ability.

The rules are both streamlined and heavily combat-oriented. Each weapon has initiative, attack, defense, and damage statistics, but the character sheet encourages adding up all the weapon and skill bonuses before play. During a fight, the player only has to look up a single number and add it to his roll. Non-combat skills receive less detail. If you have "singing" as a skill, the rules simply point out that you can uphold the proud Norse tradition of "hoarse and barbaric yowling."

The character creation system is fast and easy for any experienced roleplayer to learn. What it isn't is diverse. There are no character classes, and most players' character points will go into the Characteristics and Abilities most useful for combat. Most beginning **Rune** characters will be cookie-cutter screaming Viking warriors who differ only in favorite weapons and a unique skill or two.

This is quite intentional. **Rune** is based on a (mediocre) computer game, and Laws wanted to recreate the sense of starting a basic character and diversifying in play. Ragnar and Thorvald and Helga the Vikings all look the same at first, but there are many different abilities to develop as they start racking up victory points.

The victory point system is where the game starts getting unusual. **Rune** characters get victory points for everything -- hitting enemies, succeeding at skill rolls, rescuing hostages, getting treasure, whatever. They also lose victory points for taking damage or letting their fellow Vikings get killed. During each "encounter" (a set of short scenes run by a single GM), players keep track of their points, noting down the increases or decreases as they happen. At the end of the encounter, they add the total points gained to their overall victory point total, and can spend the points for increases in their Abilities or Divine Gifts.

Divine Gifts are special powers given to the characters by the Norse Gods. Using their Gifts, characters can raise their Characteristics, make their weapons fly into their hands, fire lightning bolts, or summon clouds of fog to hide themselves. The Gifts are both powerful and flexible -- players can buy new Gifts at any time, even in the middle of combat.

Then there's "death insurance." Before any encounter, a player may spend 25 victory points to save a copy of his character. If the character then gets killed, the player simply gets out the new copy and puts it into play. It's just like a computer game, and Laws spends a hilarious paragraph trying to justify the rule before writing, "Nah, screw it. This *is* exactly like saving your game on the computer. It makes absolutely no sense in the fictional reality of the setting, but it makes the game work better. So make good use of the rule, and try not to think about it too much."

That wisecracking tone is a crucial part of **Rune's** appeal. The game constantly mocks itself, lampooning the absurdities behind every hack-and-slash rule and cheesy bad-Viking-movie detail. Laws knows Vikings didn't wear horned helmets, and he knows you know it, but these Vikings wear horned helmets and are proud of it. They hack their way through linear stories without apology, and hate to leave the dungeon because "if they go home they'll have to take baths and listen to their nagging parents."

For all the jokes, though, the game isn't a parody. Laws puts his finger on the biggest flaw of hack-and-slash gaming -- namely, that gamemasters get tired of yet another dungeon long before their players do -- and presents a brilliant solution. In **Rune**, the action stays fresh because everyone does a little gamemastering and a lot of playing.

During a typical session of **Rune**, each player runs one or two encounters. Each encounter has one to five events in it, and each encounter is almost entirely self-contained. When Player A is done running his encounter, he simply hands over the narrative axe to Player B. When she's done, Player C runs his encounter, and so on. Each "runner" must design his encounter according to strict rules of engagement, and each runner gains victory points according to how viciously he can abuse the characters without actually killing them.

(What happens to Player B's character when she takes over the game? Well, one of the other players takes over the character and runs it as a "proxy." The proxy gets half the character's victory points at the end of the encounter, giving the proxy motivation to help the runner's character survive and prosper.)

The encounter design rules take up almost half the book, and provide step-by-step instructions for building monsters, placing traps and treasure, and filling maps with interesting terrain. Every die roll and situation has a cost, forcing the encounter's designer to balance risks and rewards. The system is both comprehensive and flexible -- there are plenty of pre-built foes and traps, but a good designer can present any situation with a few well-chosen die rolls.

Rotating the runner duties brings back the cooperative aspect of roleplaying. Every player shares the responsibility of leading the game, reducing the strain a single GM suffers. At the same time, the competition for victory points spurs each player to design the best scenarios they can and to play as well as they can in other runners' encounters.

Rune also opens up new possibilities in competitive roleplay. The player with the most victory points at the end of a session wins that session, and the player with the most wins at the end of a campaign wins that campaign. Leagues and tournaments are the logical next step, and **Rune** provides rules for both. As always, the tone is distinctly tongue-

in-cheek. The preferred league format is known as the Inexorable Death Trudge, and Laws writes that it "rewards your lunatic persistence in setting aside all other activities and family relationships to play *Rune* until you start to sound, look, and smell like an authentic Viking warrior."

The rules also encourage swapping encounters over the Internet, just as fans of computer games swap new adventures and modifications. Players win extra victory points for both designing and running great encounters, but there's no reason you can't run somebody else's encounter. (The sample adventure at the end of the book encourages new players to do just that.)

Rune isn't for everyone. Aspiring thespians and deep-thinking problem solvers will be distressed to learn that their skills are virtually useless in this game. Historical nitpickers will cringe at the idea of mecha-dwarves. And while *Rune* does its best to be inviting to new gamers, even the experienced roleplayers who tested the game with me were a little nervous about jumping in and running an encounter the first time they played. Running great encounters clearly takes a bit of practice.

If you can let your hair down and let yourself run a little wild, though, *Rune* is a howling good time. It's fast, it's furious, and there's always something new to do. And who doesn't want to get in touch with their inner screaming Viking?

-- *Chris Aylott*

Catherine Sforza

Countess of Forli (1462/63-1509)

by Joe G. Kushner

During the height of the Renaissance, few women mastered their own destiny. Even for a Noble, it required a strong will and the respect of those under you. Catherine Sforza had it all. Tall, slim, and blonde, she would be one of the women who ruled others. Born the bastard daughter of Galeazzo Maria Sforza in 1462, Catherine, also historically referred to as Caterina, was engaged to Girolamo Riaria, nephew of Pope Sisto IV, at the age of nine. In 1477, Catherine left for Rome after her father was murdered. Hardly a year later, Caterina gave birth to Bianca (b 1478), her first of six children.

Well-educated and always starving for more knowledge, she kept book recipes and prescriptions, networking with many noble women. Some of these recipes were dangerous poisons that Catherine mastered and put to good use throughout her life.

In 1484, she and her husband took possession of Castel Sant' Angelo in Rome but was forced to surrender it a mere 13 days afterwards. Still, for being seven months pregnant at the time, it was an impressive feat. When they left Rome, they journeyed to Romagna, and took up residence in Forli. Girolamo Riaria's weakness became exposed, failing as both a ruler and a soldier. Catherine produced justice. Riaria's failure as a ruler became almost too much, when in 1487 -- during revolts -- he failed to do anything, leaving Catherine in charge.

In 1488, the Orsi family murdered Riaria and imprisoned Catherine with her children. Escaping the Orsi family, she allied herself with Milan and Bologna and took her vengeance. This event transformed her into a tyrant who sought harsh revenge for any wrongdoings against her. Despite being an excellent military leader, not only tactically, but on the field (she was feared by her soldiers), she was more infamous for her cruelty. She earned names like "virago," "bastard," and "daughter of iniquity." The free town of Forli doesn't care however, as it flourishes, producing such talents as the painter Melozzo degli Ambrogi and his student Marco Palmezzano. In a time when anti-Semitism still thrived, she used her considerable influence to bring Jewish bankers to Forli.

During 1488, she loved Antonio Maria Ordelauffi, but the Pope Sisto IV exiled Ordelauffi away, granting Catherine domination of Forli and Imola in the name of her son, Ottaviano. So much did she love power, that she held those reins over her own son.

An infamous episode of her power thirst was illustrated when her children were held hostage, and those responsible demanded she surrender her castle. Even when the children were threatened with death, Catherine is said to have boasted that she could always have more and held onto power.

Being alone never seemed to sit well with Catherine though; in 1489 she seduced her nineteen-year-old brother-in-law, Giacomo Feo, taking him as a husband and giving birth to Bernardino in 1490. Feo followed her first husband into the grave, murdered in 1495. Some said her son instigated the murder. Part of Catherine's punishment for Ottaviano, was total loss



by **K. David Ladage**

It is a rare day in the *GURPS Universe* that someone does not say something to the effect of "*GURPS* does not handle Supers very well" or "*GURPS* breaks down after 'x' number of points."

Why?

Most cite the fact that it was the intent of *GURPS* to simulate reality. The point-based system was designed around the idea of 25 character points being an average run-of-the-mill Joe, while 100 character points being a heroic individual. Thus, most campaigns give 100 points (or so) to the player characters, making them a cut above the rest. Once you reach very high point levels (there is no consensus as to what that point value is exactly), then the rules that were designed for lower point totals begin to break down.

And those that cite this are probably correct, at least to a point.

There are some problems with *GURPS* after you get up in the points. Combat becomes so deadly in *SUPERS* games that players dare not use that 12d6 impaling area-effect, continuous effect Hell-blast for fear of killing a few dozen innocent bystanders. One solution that was offered in the *Supers* book (and later in *Compendium I*) was Stun Points.

Stun Points were a sort of "cut the deadliness of combat way down" solution that came with some baggage of its own. For example, all persons are equally effected, making combat in the streets between thugs unrealistically comical -- what are we trying to save them from? It also does not provide what the Supers genre is screaming for: clear breaks between the average, the heroic, and the super-heroic.

But even in other games, campaigns can get a little cinematic without going to the Supers extreme. Without making the rules in one game different than the rules in another. In a game that claims to be Generic, how do you handle these disparities?

This article offers one possible solution to this dilemma. It involves three elements:

- **Stun:** A variation on how to calculate how many Stun Points the character has.
- **Combat:** A variation on how to use Stun Points in combat.
- **Scaling:** A variation on character point costs to scale things such that high-point characters are less likely to be abusive.

Calculating Stun Points

The first step is to modify the Stun Point calculation rules. As they currently stand, all characters get Stun equal to 5xHP. This is not very useful in the long run, as it applies equally to all; it probably makes more sense that Stun should scale with the concept of the character. And so, what is proposed is the following steps to calculating Stun for the character:

1. All players have a Health (HT) score that forms the base of Hit Points (HP). Optionally, you can use Strength (ST).
2. Players may buy up HP as per normal costs. Treat this as additional muscle mass. It can be purchased later as "intensive training." See below.
3. Stun Points (Stun) equals $HP \times Z$ where Z is calculated as follows:

Baseline +2.0

Advantages *

Combat Reflexes +0.6

Fit +0.2

Very Fit +0.4

Hard to Kill +0.1

High Pain Threshold +0.4

Disadvantages **

Combat Paralysis -0.6

Low Pain Threshold -0.4

Physical Attributes (ST, DX) ***

00 - 04 -0.4

05 - 08 -0.2

09 - 12 N/A

13 - 16 +0.2

17 - 20 +0.4

21+ +0.6

Combat Skills ****

None N/A

01-05 points +0.2

06-10 points +0.4

11-20 points +0.6

21-30 points +0.8

31+ points +1.0

- o *** Advantages:** Any other advantage that the GM feels should apply can be fit into this calculation. Examples might include Trained by Master for Martial Artists and Initiation for practitioners of ritual Magic. The Hard to Kill advantage provides +0.1 per level.
- o **** Disadvantages:** The GM is free to have disadvantages that can pull from the calculation.
- o ***** Attributes:** If the variant rule of $ST=HP$ is used, replace ST in this calculation with HT.
- o ****** Combat Skills:** This is the "hardened veteran" rule and may be dropped without much effect. These modifiers are here so that combat oriented characters do not have to have all of the physical advantages to take advantage of this scaling effect.

4. Players may purchase additional Stun as per normal costs. Treating Stun like Hit Points in Dungeons and Dragons(TM), they represent the ability to avoid major damage in combat.
5. Extra Hit Points and Extra Stun Points need to be carefully monitored. If the scaling rules (see below) are not being used, limits of +3 Hit Points and +15 Stun Points are very reasonable. If the scaling rules are being used,

these limits are no longer needed.

Stun in Combat

Stun, as defined in the standard *GURPS* rules, is treated like Hit Points -- only you have a lot more of them. They give examples as to how you can scale Stun and Hit Points to slide the realism meter one way or the other. This article offers another option.

1. When dealing damage in combat, all of the damage should be taken from Stun. All weapons and such deal damage as per normal.
2. When rolling the damage, however, treat all 6s rolled on the dice as though they do no Stun damage, but inflict 1 point of HP damage instead. Thus, each die does the following:

Die Damage Result

- 1: 1 Stun, 0 HP
 - 2: 2 Stun, 0 HP
 - 3: 3 Stun, 0 HP
 - 4: 4 Stun, 0 HP
 - 5: 5 Stun, 0 HP
 - 6: 0 Stun, 1 HP
3. Next, apply the multipliers for Cutting, Impaling and Bullet damage to both the Stun and the HP damage. Round all Stun damage up (1.1 = 2 Stun damage) and all HP damage down (1.9 = 1 HP damage).
 4. Whenever a critical hit is indicated, deal with it as normal (double damage, ignore DR, whatever the chart tells you).
 5. When Hit Points reach 0, treat this as per the normal rules for HP reaching -HP instead.
 6. When Stun reaches 0, the character is fighting to remain alert. Treat this as though the character was suffering from a continuous -1 from Shock. For every 5 full points of Stun below 0 the character is, they suffer an additional -1. This penalty applies to all rolls that Shock would normally effect.
 7. Damage accrued while the character has 0 or less Stun deals one HP damage per die inflicted in addition to the damage rolled (as pre #2) above.

Scaling the Game

One of the reasons that *GURPS* may begin to break down at high point values is that advantages are not scaled. Perhaps an explanation is needed. Attributes in *GURPS* are scaled. The scale is based upon the fact that the cost of an attribute is increased as the effect increases. From the *GURPS Basic Set*:

Lvl	Cost
1	-80
2	-70
3	-60
4	-50
5	-40
6	-30
7	-20
8	-15
9	-10
10	0
11	10

12	20
13	30
14	45
15	60
16	80
17	100
18	125
19	150
20	175

If we pay no attention to the odd cost of -15 character points for an attribute level of 8, we can see that the scale of *GURPS* is roughly linear for negative values, and scales up as you get into the positive values.

Let's look at this in a different light, as a function of the scale of the cost. Divide those values by 10. This then becomes our scale. If we continue to assume that a value of 10 is the normal level, then the scale can be applied as a modification of that standard. Witness:

Lvl	Scale
-9	-8
-8	-7
-7	-6
-6	-5
-5	-4
-4	-3
-3	-2
-2	-1.5
-1	-1
0	0
+1	1
+2	2
+3	3
+4	4.5
+5	6
+6	8
+7	10
+8	12.5
+9	15
+10	17.5

Now let us look at this chart as though the attributes -- DX for example -- were listed as having a cost of 10/level. Multiply that cost by the scale of the number of levels desired. Plus six (+6) levels has a scale of 8, resulting in a cost of (10x8=) 80 points for +6 levels of Dexterity.

Now, look at this as a guideline for costs in all things *GURPS*. Advantages represent the levels above the baseline of 0; disadvantages represent the levels below that same baseline. Because some costs in *GURPS* are not even, it is suggested that one of the following two scales be used as an alternative:

Lvl	Scale A	Scale B
-9	-9	-9
-8	-8	-8
-7	-7	-7
-6	-6	-6
-5	-5	-5
-4	-4	-4
-3	-3	-3
-2	-2	-2
-1	-1	-1
0	0	0
+1	1	1
+2	2	2
+3	3	4
+4	5	8
+5	7	12
+6	10	16
+7	13	20
+8	16	24
+9	19	28
+10	22	32

Scale A is for those that like the current cost of attributes, but do not want to deal with half-multipliers. Levels above +10 add 3 to the effective scale. Scale B is for those that feel the scale *GURPS* uses is a bit shallow and could use a little steeping of the grade. Levels above +10 add 4 to the scale. Once your scale is chosen, apply it to every advantage and disadvantage in the game. All of the examples below use Scale A.

- **Attributes:** With the exception of Strength (see *Compendium I*) use the chosen scale, assigning the base cost for each level of an attribute at 10 character points. For example, an attribute purchased at -3 levels (7) costs ($-3 \times 10 =$) -30 points, and one purchased at +6 levels (16) costs ($10 \times 10 =$) 100 points.
- **Disadvantages:** All disadvantages are considered as being negative values on the scale. As this side of the scale is linear, the costs for disadvantages are not effected.
- **Advantages:** All advantages are considered as being positive values on the scale. The scale modifies the cost of advantages that can be purchased in levels. So, for example, Alertness normally costs 5/level. When scaled, six (+6) levels of Alertness now costs ($10 \times 5 =$) 50 points.
- **Similar/Overlapping Advantages:** *Warning:* This rule will complicate calculating costs for advantages. All advantages that are overlapping or sub-sets of another should be carefully considered. For example: Acute senses. Acute senses are sub-sets of the Alertness advantage. Thus, if a character purchases six (+6) levels of Alertness as well as six (+6) levels of Acute Vision, then the character has purchased, in effect, +12 to Vision checks. This will need to be scaled in. First apply the cost of the more encompassing advantage; then, apply the scaled cost of the total bonus to the sub-set advantage minus the scaled cost of the effective bonus granted by the encompassing advantage:

Alertness +6: (5x10=) 50-points

Acute Vision +6: Effective bonus is +12, which would cost (2x28=) 56-points on its own. Since six levels of that are covered in Alertness +6, we subtract (2x10=) 20-points that constitute the cost of the cost of the first six (+6) levels, giving us a total cost of 36 points for Acute Vision +6 added to Alertness +6. Total cost of the two advantages is (50+36=) 86-points.

Other Sources

By using these three principles, you can accomplish several things. You can keep the combat rules the same, but vary the deadlines to the characters by the types of characters they make, and you can keep higher point characters in line by scaling the cost of advantages the same way that attributes are scaled. There are other things that you can do to help keep things in line or simply alter the feel of the game. Suggestions that have been bounced on the web by many include:

- *Gulliver* (<http://www.io.com/~tbone>) includes a rule for dropping the points gained for similar disadvantages. This is a very effective rule for keeping a character from getting more points for the overlapping effects of a series of disadvantages (such as bad sight, color blindness, etc.) than they would get for the entire removal of the effected area of the character (such as blindness). This set of rules has a lot of other things to offer as well. It is certainly worth a look or ten.
- Many people have suggested that Physical Skills should cost a maximum of 4-points per level. If this is established, it does have the effect of encouraging characters to spend points on skills more than super-attributes. The effectiveness of this left to the reader to determine.
- The ST -vs.- HT debate for establishing Fatigue and Hit Points can be settled via a compromise. Make Fatigue equal to $(ST+ST+HT)/3$ and make Hit Points equal to $(ST+HT+HT)/3$. The effective average is the same, but this makes neither attribute the end-all of the figured statistics. For those that wish, these formulae can be reversed . . .

And so on. *GURPS* is a very flexible system. With the right attitude, it can handle just about anything you want to throw at it.

Dork Tower!



Dork Tower!



Murphy's Rules



by John Kovalic

Murphy's Rules



Murphy's Rules



Munchkins and Moons

(A baby mutant version of this column originally appeared over on the .roleplaying [discussion boards](#). Chad Underkoffler commented that, if I made my post the column for this week, he'd give me a 5 rating. Being a believer in listening to my audience [singular] -- and a slave to my ratings -- here we go.)

* * *

Monte Cook, writer of the new 3rd Edition *Dungeon Master's Guide* and the forthcoming *Return to the Temple of Elemental Evil* and *d20 Call of Cthulhu* (both of which I'm personally looking forward to), has his own website at www.montecook.com. (As an aside, I'm still cursing somewhat not getting stevenmarsh.com when I had the chance . . .)

Recently, Monte posted a column at <http://www.montecook.com/anrant.html> about munchkins and munchkinism. One of the arguments he makes is that what most people call "munchkins" they often mean "people who don't play the way I do," to the point that it's not particularly meaningful. And even if it *did* seem to refer to a specific style of play, there's nothing wrong with those styles of play.

(The column goes on to talk about other stuff; feel free to check it out!)

I personally disagree somewhat; while I know the definition of "munchkin" can be (and often is) overly broad in its strokes, I do have a personal definition that works for me.

A munchkin, in my mind, is a player who places his (or her) fun above everyone else's.

The thief character who stabs another PC in the back in the first five minutes of a new campaign? Munchkin.

The player who insists on arguing every rule, every decision, every action? Munchkin.

The player who wants to know what the name of the shopkeeper's horse is, an hour after everyone else's character has finished shopping and is bored? Munchkin.

Roleplaying is, at its core, a collaborative process; everyone is there (theoretically) to have fun. One player deciding -- against the wishes of everyone else -- to kill all that lives is just as munchkininess as a player deciding -- against the wishes of everyone else -- to try and spark a romantic roleplaying interest with all that lives. If you presume that the group has assembled solely for your personal amusement, you are a munchkin.

Contrariwise, if everyone has fun, it's not munchkinism. If all the players want to kill every living thing -- and the GM is not unwilling -- then it's not munchkinism; it's having fun. (I personally call it *Talisman*, but there you go . . .) If all the players want to sit around and write sonnets to each other and play out their characters' college lives in real time -- and, again, the GM is not unwilling -- then they're having fun. If I, as a player, tolerate your killing all beings, and you tolerate my sonnet writing -- and the GM's having fun -- then it's not munchkinism. It's compromise, and a core of most successful games.

Note that this doesn't presume you are placing your own fun subservient to the groups'; your own fun (in my mind) should be equal to everyone else's. (In that regard, I don't believe a roleplaying group is any different from any other relationship.) Now, if you *don't* like the way everyone else wants to play, and you keep quiet, stay in that group, and are miserable, then you're a fool. But if you go ahead and try to force everyone else to your way of playing . . . well, you can probably guess the word I'd use.

* * *

Many moons ago, I'd mentioned the calendar I used [for one of my campaigns](#), with its 28 day-months and full moons

on the first of each month.

Well, one of our readers (thanks, Mike!) sent in this link:

<http://sunearth.gsfc.nasa.gov/eclipse/phase/phasecat.html>

It covers five thousand years of lunar cycles, from -1999 B.C. to 3000 A.D. (including an astronomical year 0). It should be useful to any historical campaign. As Mike put it, "Your tax dollars at work!"

Of course, it's still not useful for our *Fading Suns* campaigns set in the year 5000 and beyond . . . stupid lazy NASA. But hopefully it'll help out some folks somewhere.

* * *

Just as a reminder to folks, we've had a few incidents over the past month or so of folks posting articles and columns to websites, mailing lists, and newsgroups. Now, I talked [a few months ago](#) about not sending articles to friends. I'm not sure if I explicitly said that you aren't supposed to send articles to strangers either. Please: don't send articles to strangers.

When everyone subscribed, they had to agree to certain things. We've tried to summarize the high points on those at our copyright FAQ (http://www.sjgames.com/pyramid/login/amgr/copyright_faq.html).

One of the things it says is, "At any rate, redistributing *Pyramid* material is strictly prohibited. If someone does it, we will terminate their subscription. So **please** don't. OK? This whole Web magazine thing is still an experiment, and having our material redistributed is one of the things that could sink it."

Regrettably, we've needed to do this a couple of times recently. We *really* don't like to, but between the original agreement when you came aboard, the FAQ, my reminders, and common sense, we like to think that we've done our best to keep you informed.

So . . . please, *please*, **please** don't forward articles to friends . . . *or* strangers.

(I guess I should say at this point not to forward articles to enemies, either . . . even if you really don't like the article or know it would cause them pain. Buy them a gift subscription, then forward the link to pain directly to them.)

Thanks!

--*Steven Marsh*

* * *

Last week's answer: UK1: Beyond the Crystal Cave, for Advanced Dungeon's & Dragons. (This was probably my first exposure to an adventure that -- optimally -- was best solved by *not* attacking everything that moved. It was quite a mind opener.)

(Two stars) "They all seem to be so depressed that they're up and about that you want to put a stake in them just to put them out of their misery. But when you try, do they thank you? Nooooooooo . . ."

I Scream, You Scream, We All Scream For Mandrakes

"FERD. I have this night digg'd up a mandrake.

CARD. Say you?

FERD. And I am grown mad with 't."

-- John Webster, *The Duchess of Malfi*, II:v:1-3

In roleplaying games, as in life generally, vegetables get little respect. However, just as they provide essential vitamins and minerals for a balanced diet, they can also add a healthy glow, or even a whole new dimension (or more than one) to a balanced game. Especially if, as with the much-maligned mandrake, they are Eldritch Angel-Spawned Demon Vegetable Beings From Beneath The Valley of the Templars. So, let us serve up a steaming helping of mandrakes, and dig in.

Let's begin with the facts -- after all, the mandrake (from the Greek, *mandragoras*) is a real plant. At least four of them, in fact, there being four species of the genus *Mandragora*, of which *Mandragora officinarum* is the primary. (The name "mandrake" has also been applied to the briony, American or white ginseng, and peony, among others.) Its root is often naturally forked, and can occasionally appear like a small man. One possible derivation for *mandragoras* is the Persian *mard amgya* or "man plant." (Pythagoras even called it "anthropomorphia.") It grows naturally in the Eastern Mediterranean, that hotbed of magic and mysticism, ranging from the lower slopes of the Venetian Alps to the Persian lowlands, and can be cultivated as far north as Britain. Mandrakes are of the order Solanaceae, along with henbane, belladonna, and tobacco -- magical company, all with powerful alkaloid chemistries. (One symptom of Solanaceae psychosis is the belief that one is changing into an animal; could the mystical [werewolves](#) and their [Benandanti](#) brethren depend on the mandrake for their transformative powers?) Mandrakes are no exception, being high (heh heh) in hyoscyamine, scopolamine, and atropine.

"[I]n that valley which encompasses the city on the north side, there is a certain place called Baaras, which produces a root of the same name with itself; its color is like to that of flame, and towards the evening it sends out a certain ray like lightning: it is not easily taken by such as would do it, but recedes from their hands, nor will yield itself to be taken quietly, until either the urine of a woman, or her menstrual blood, be poured upon it; nay, even then it is certain death to those that touch it, unless anyone take and hang the root itself down from his hand, and so carry it away. It may also be taken another way, without danger, which is this: they dig a trench quite round about it, till the hidden part of the root be very small, they then tie a dog to it, and when the dog tries hard to follow him that tied him, this root is easily plucked up, but the dog dies immediately."

-- Josephus, *The Jewish War*, VII:6

Which is why, among other reasons, the ancients began to take notice of it. As early as 900 B.C. or so, the aphrodisiac and fecundative powers of the mandrake appear in Genesis 30:14-16, where the barren Rachel dickers for mandrakes with Leah. (One Arabic term for mandrake is *abu ruhr*, the "father of life.") At the same time, the Assyrians were using it as a narcotic -- a possible derivation for *mandragoras* is a Sanskrit *mandras agora*, "sleep stuff." By the time of Dioscorides, around 45 A.D., there is documented mention of its use as a surgical anaesthetic. However, its supernatural existence continued to shadow its scientific one; around 300 B.C., Theophrastos swore that one could only harvest it after cutting three circles around it with a sword, and "dancing round the plant and saying many things possible about the mysteries of love." Josephus, apropos of nothing, just "happens" to include an obvious description of the mandrake harvest in *The Jewish War*, complete with "a certain ray like lightning." Let's dig further.

"It is gathered by strategem. Listen in what manner. The man who is to gather it must fly round about it; must take care he does not touch it. Then let him take a dog, bound. Let it be tied to it -- which has been close shut up and has fasted three days and let it be shown bread and called from afar -- the dog will draw it to him -- the root will break -- it will send forth a cry -- the dog will fall dead at the cry which he will hear. Such virtue this herb has but that no one may hear it or he must die and if the man heard it he would directly die. Therefore he must stop his ears, and take care that he hear not the cry, lest he die as the dog will do which shall hear the cry."

-- Philip de Thau, *Bestiary* (1121)

By the early medieval period, the dog, who appears in Josephus and Dioscorides (who mentions that a Roman name for the mandrake is *mala canina*, or "dog's evil") gets a specific cause of death. No longer is it just the mysterious emanations of the root, but a fearsome death-shriek, that kills the one who plucks the mandrake. In one of his glorious *Adventures in Unhistory*, Avram Davidson suggests that the cry has been transplanted, as it were, to the mandrake from the sufferer. An overdose of mandrake can be deadly poisonous or trigger psychotic dementia, while an underdose (of a patient on a medieval surgical table) will create yet more possibilities for shrieks. However, some of it must have come from the ever-closer association of the mandrake and the man -- the manlike mandrake's emergence from the ground is its birth-cry and death-rattle all in one.

"Give me to drink mandragora . . .

That I might sleep out this great gap of time

My Antony is away."

-- William Shakespeare, *Antony and Cleopatra*, I:v:6-9

From anthropo-, then, back to morphia. Between its sleep-inducing and hallucinogenic properties, the mandrake got yet another association with the supernatural. (Magic mushroom historian and fanatic John M. Allegro even claims that the true "mandrake" was the amanita or fly agaric mushroom, and derives all three from the same Sumerian root *nam tar agar*, "demon plant of the field.") Both sleep and hallucination appear in the Dutch mandrake legends; the mandrake in Holland was *pisdifje*, or "little brain thief," and in legend Dutch thieves could use mandrakes to make themselves invisible, unlock doors, and send everyone in a house into a deep sleep.

Which throws us hard on our next lexicographical tangle -- those powers are also the abilities of the "Hand of Glory," or in French, *main-de-gloire*, or *mandagloria*. And where do both mandrakes and hands of glory come from? Hanged thieves. That's right; the "hand of glory" is the left hand of a thief pickled in herbs (like, perhaps, mandrake). Meanwhile, the involuntary ejaculation and urination accompanying sudden death by hanging supposedly fertilized the ground beneath the gallows with -- of course -- mandrakes. The German *Galgenmännchen* ("little gallows man") is yet another evocative term for our plant for all seasons.

"Go and catch a falling star,

Get with child a mandrake root,

Tell me where all past years are,

Or who cleft the Devil's foot;

Teach me to hear mermaids singing."

-- John Donne

How much of this comes from the notion that sperm, itself, took the shape of tiny men? From tiny sperm-man, to tiny seed-man in ground, to larger man-root -- the connection seems obvious. But the fallen sperm, or blood, of a sacrifice has been creating forked plants ever since the divine thief Prometheus' "ichor" fell on Corcyra to make the crocus. (And what connection with Circe, who used mandrakes in her magic against Odysseus, hides in that collation of syllables?) The mandrake itself eventually came to life in German and French legend; after harvesting it, one must baptize it in wine, dress it in a tunic, and bathe it regularly. These tiny elves, the "maglores" in France and "alraunes" in Germany, would thence bring good luck and wealth to their keeper. (The Emperor Rudolf had a pair in Prague.) I leave others to speculate on the connection these tiny plant-people have with the ones who disport themselves in the occult botanical [Voynich Manuscript](#) -- discovered in the *Villa Mondragone*

Simpler, generally, to assume that the mandrake is a demon on Earth, as the Assyrians in fact did. That whole area seems skittish about the mandrakes -- the Arabs also call it *tufaq al-Shaitan*, the "devil's apple" or *baidh ul-djinn*, the "eggs of the djinn." The mandrake supposedly sprang from the leftover clay after God created man, and according to Helena Blavatsky, "in the secret catechism of the Druses, the sons of God create men by descending to earth and animating seven mandragoras." Those "sons of God," of course, are the [Enochian Nephilim](#), fallen angels "hanged" between heaven and earth, trapped in the morning dew -- which Pliny says enhances the powers of the mandrake.

"No curious Metaphysic can withhold

The heart from that mandragora she craves:

*Unreasonable, old as Earth is old,
The blind ecstatic miracle that saves.
Far off the pagan trumpeters of Pride
Call to the blood . . ."*

-- Rachel Annand Taylor, "The Night Obscure of the Soul"

Like ivy, then, the mandrake spreads roots and vines throughout the realm of High Weirdness. Does the True Mandrake spring from the seed of the Nephilim, those half-divine entities who terrorized the Fertile Crescent back in our mythical past? Or are the hallucinogenic mandrakes the true meaning of the thyrsus wand of [Dionysos](#) -- since a Syriac term for mandrake is "vine of the earth"? While we're briefly back on mandrake names, of course, that Germanic "alraune" begs for investigation, springing as it does from High German *alrune* -- "high runes" or "high secret." Or perhaps from the Arabic *albiruhan* ("mandrake"), which also spawned the Spanish *brujo* ("witch"). Tacitus describes the early Germans as having female witch-warriors called Aurinia, who sound like [Amazons](#) -- the "golden (*auri*) women." The Amazons, by the way, also lived in Thrace (Dioscorides refers to mandrakes as "Thracians"), and became the Sirens -- whose deadly cries echo with mandragoric power. Now that we've completely confused the origin of the True Mandrake, where did it go? Did the Templars discover it in the valley of Baaras, from Josephus' hints -- and bring it back and worship it (buried up to its neck in earth, perhaps) as [Baphomet?](#)

Perhaps the True Mandrake, bisociatively, is all of these things, the genetic seed-pod for Amazons, Nephilim, and [Spider Goddesses](#) (in German legend, unwatched alraunes turn into spiders), the mystic Baphomet, and the secret to the dream-warriors and Dionysian mystics alike. It can throw quite the tizzy into any game to drop a True Mandrake on your PCs, and let them fight off Amazons, Templars, Benandanti, werewolves, [Venusians](#) (the late Romans knew Venus as Mandragoritis, the "star of the mandrake"), djinn -- and the hungry servitors of [Iron Chef](#) Vegetarian. Simbalabim, and bon appetit.



by **Darren Watts**

"And ye shall know the truth, and the truth will make you free."

--*John 8:32*, inscribed above the entrance to the CIA's headquarters in Langley, Virginia.

Introduction

Any modern-day campaign, no matter the genre, may at some point have to deal with the Central Intelligence Agency, if for no other reason than the massive influence it has had on international relations in the last century. This, of course, goes double for a campaign involving politics, espionage and Really Big Secrets. The CIA's checkered history makes them the bugbear of choice for conspiracy theorists of countless stripes. Obviously, an organization so secretive and pervading makes an outstanding fictional villain, but the reality, as always, remains a bit more complicated. This article is an attempt to sort out the facts on hand about the CIA, and clear up some common errors and misperceptions about the "Clandestine Service." Inside you will find a fairly detailed timeline illuminating some of the high (and low) points of the Agency's history, an explanation of their internal structure and the various Directorates, information on designing and roleplaying CIA characters, and a list of references for further reading.

This essay tries to view the CIA through as mundane a lens as possible -- in other words, only the historical events accepted as fact by the most sober-minded of observers are treated as gospel, and any other speculation about the role of the CIA in the "Secret History" of the world is presented as only that, speculation. Whatever role the CIA may play in your own universe in political assassinations, manipulation of the world's financial markets, or suppression of That Which The World Is Not Ready To Know, remains for the individual GM to fill in. As always, fnoord.

Timeline

- 1941** President Roosevelt appoints General William "Wild Bill" Donovan as Director of the Office of the Coordinator of Information., the US's first modern foreign intelligence agency. In 1942, the agency is renamed the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), the predecessor of the CIA.
- 1945** Truman disbands the OSS on September 20th after the end of World War II.
- 1946** Truman changes his mind about the need for an intelligence coordinator as Cold War tensions increase. He forms the Central Intelligence Group, headed first by Admiral Sidney W. Souers, then by Lt. General Hoyt S. Vandenburg.
- 1947** On July 26, Truman establishes the Central Intelligence Agency. The first Director is Admiral Roscoe H. Hillenkoeter. (Sometimes Souers and Vandenburg are included on lists of former directors, which may throw off your count depending on the source you're using. This article stays with the convention of only counting the directors after the name change.)
- 1948** In perhaps the first effective use of covert action by the CIA, millions of dollars are secretly provided to the

Christian Democratic Party in Italy to assist them in defeating the Communists in the general election. (The CDP party is traditionally the party favored by the Mafia, and the supposed historical connection between them and the CIA is traced back to this activity.)

1950 Walter Bedell Smith appointed second Director.

The CIA assists Philippine president Ramon Magsaysay in putting down the Communist "Huk" rebellion.

1953 Allen W. Dulles appointed third Director.

In Iran, a CIA operation led by Kermit Roosevelt supported the forces of the Shah, Reza Pahlavi, in retaking control of the government after Prime Minister Mohammed Mossadeq attempted to nationalize the Iranian oil industry. The Shah would remain linked in his country's eyes with the US government, eventually leading to the student uprisings of the late 1970s.

MK-Ultra testing begins. The CIA tries to determine if LSD has any potential for use in covert operations by testing it on unwitting subjects, including military officers and prisoners. One recipient of a massive dose of LSD, Army scientist Frank Olson, commits suicide by jumping out of a window while tripping. The MK-Ultra paperwork would be mostly destroyed on the orders of Richard Helms in 1972, but limited documentation would still be uncovered by the Church Committee. It is believed by many that at the same time the CIA was experimenting with hallucinogens, they were also investigating other strange phenomena, such as psychic powers. It is certainly a matter of record that individuals within the CIA had strong interest in the subject; however, evidence that anything came from this research remains thin and largely unconvincing. It is, however, interesting speculation.

1954 The CIA strikes another blow for big business by assisting in the overthrow of Guatemalan president Jacobo Arbenz after he attempts to nationalize property owned by the United Fruit Co. Eisenhower sees this as a major victory over the insurgent forces of Communism, and the CIA's reputation for successful covert action after the successes of Iran and Guatemala is heavily inflated within the inner circles of Washington.

1959 The US Marines, in Haiti ostensibly to train local soldiers, support dictator Jean-Claude "Baby Doc" Duvalier in putting down a rebellion. The CIA allegedly takes advantage of his gratitude to get Haitian support in activities against Cuba.

1960 CIA pilot Francis Gary Powers' U-2 spy plane is shot down in Russia, and Powers is taken prisoner, publicly tried and imprisoned. (After seventeen months, he is traded back to the US in exchange for Russian spy Rudolph Abel.) The U-2 program had begun in 1955, using experimental planes for suborbital flyovers while taking films of missile sites and military units. These planes have a cover story of being used by NASA for atmospheric experiments, but the cameras recovered by the Russians from the wreckage give the lie to that story. The U-2 is later replaced by the Blackbird SR-71, and then by satellites.

1961 The new CIA headquarters at Langley, VA is built. See below for more details.

The Bay of Pigs invasion takes place. The CIA has been working on a plan to invade Cuba and unseat Castro since he rose to power in 1959 and overthrew Fulgencio Batista's dictatorship. Despite President Kennedy's misgivings, a force of Cuban exiles and mercenaries is assembled to attack Cuba, with the primary landing site at the Bay of Pigs on the southwestern coast. The invaders are overwhelmed by Cuban forces, at least partly due to a lack of promised air support from US forces, and are either slaughtered or imprisoned. The CIA is heavily criticized for underestimating the capabilities of Castro's army and overestimating the popular support another revolution would have. Kennedy himself also comes under fire for appearing indecisive in the face of the Communist threat.

John A. McCone is appointed fourth Director when Kennedy fires Allen Dulles. Kennedy is reportedly so angry with the CIA after the Bay of Pigs that he says privately he intends to break up the organization.

1962 CIA U-2 overflights reveal that the Soviets are building and arming missile sites in Cuba.

In response, Kennedy places a naval blockade on the island to keep Soviet vessels from delivering more missiles. After months of hovering at the brink of a global nuclear war, Khrushchev agrees to remove the missiles

in exchange for promises by the US never to invade Cuba, as well as concessions regarding US missiles in Turkey.

1963 President Kennedy is assassinated by Lee Harvey Oswald in Dallas. The reputed connections between Oswald, the CIA, the Mafia, and anti-Castro Cubans are far too enormous and convoluted to go into here, but a wealth of information of wildly varying quality is easily available. The Warren Commission, a seven-man committee assigned to investigate the assassination, includes Allen Dulles.

1964 The CIA supports the Chilean Christian Democrat Eduardo Frei in his election victory over Marxist Salvador Allende.

1965 William F. Raborn appointed fifth Director.

Indonesian President Sukarno increases his ties to the Communist party and China. The CIA supports Army Chief of Staff Suharto in his taking effective control of the government, and indirectly supports his ensuing bloody purge of communists.

1966 Richard Helms appointed sixth Director.

Leftist magazine Ramparts begins a series of exposes of CIA domestic activity, including the funding of the National Student Association in an attempt to "protect international student groups from being infiltrated by communists." Though perhaps not a direct violation of the CIA's charter, it is the first public awareness that the CIA may be operating domestically against radical groups.

1970 Allende finally elected to office in Chile. True to his word, he promptly nationalizes the copper industry without compensation. The CIA supports a series of military uprisings against Allende, leading eventually to Allende's suicide and the installation of Pinochet.

1971 E. Howard Hunt, formerly an officer in the Directorate of Operations, heads up a break-in at the offices of Dr. Lewis Fielding, psychiatrist to Daniel Ellsberg, who was accused of leaking the "Pentagon Papers." Though the CIA was apparently not directly involved in the break-in, Hunt was using CIA-issued false identification and camera. (The details of this operation were revealed in 1973 as part of the Watergate scandal.)

1972 Watergate. The break-in at DNC headquarters by members of the President's undercover "plumbers" involves two ex-CIA operatives, Hunt and James McCord, as well as several former Cuban assets. Nixon asks Helms to tell the FBI to stop investigating Watergate so as not to interfere with imaginary CIA activities. Helms refuses and is fired by Nixon on February 2, 1973. His replacement, James R. Schlesinger, also refuses to participate in the coverup. Schlesinger issues a directive to employees of the CIA to report directly to him any suspicions they may have of illegal activities within the Agency. The resulting report becomes known as "the Family Jewels."

1973 Schlesinger is replaced as Director by William E. Colby.

1974 Investigative reporter Seymour Hersh discovers the existence of the "family jewels" report and writes several exposes in the New York Times. According to the documents, the CIA has been intercepting mail to and from the Soviet Union since the early 1950s, in violation of federal statutes. Hersh also discovers the existence of the CIA Special Operations Group (also known as Operation CHAOS), which kept tabs on "domestic dissidents" and had in their possession files on thousands of Americans. He also exposes the MK-ULTRA project and the death of Frank Olson. The resulting scandal is enormous, and a presidential commission chaired by Nelson Rockefeller is impaneled by President Ford. At the same time, a special Senate subcommittee headed by Senator Frank Church is formed, and the Church Committee spends the next fifteen months investigating the reported abuses by the CIA.

1976 The Church Committee releases its final report to the public. Many of the most extreme charges are picked up by the press, including the long and wacky list of proposed plans to assassinate Castro. More damaging are the full revelations of the involvement of the CIA in the various coups and elections listed above, as well as the allegations of domestic spying. The CIA's public image takes a furious beating.

The Senate and House form Select Subcommittees on Intelligence, primarily in an attempt to avoid abuses like those uncovered by the Church Committee.

George H. Bush appointed ninth Director, with a mandate to restore the CIA's morale and facilitate coordination with the Select Subcommittees.

President Ford issues Executive Order 11905, officially forbidding "government officers from participating in attempts to kill foreign leaders."

1977 Stansfield Turner is appointed tenth Director.

1978 913 people die in the "Jonestown Massacre" in Guyana. Cult leader Reverend Jim Jones is linked to the CIA by columnist Jack Anderson in 1980.

1980 President Carter passes Intelligence Oversight Act, which formalizes the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence (SSCI) and the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence (HPSCI) as the formal oversight bodies for the CIA and directing them to receive copies of all intelligence generated by the CIA.

1981 William J. Casey appointed eleventh Director.

President Reagan secretly authorizes the funding and support of Nicaraguan revolutionaries, known as "Contras," against the neo-Marxist Sandanista government.

Reagan's Executive Order 12333 passes, establishing the new rules under which the DCI operates (and reconfirming the directives against carrying out foreign assassinations.)

1984 William Buckley, CIA Station Chief in Beirut, Lebanon, is kidnapped by Shiite terrorists. He dies in captivity in June, 1985.

Congress passes the Boland Amendment, banning US military aid to the Contras in Nicaragua. The National Security Council and William Casey begin searching for a way around this new law.

1985 An Iranian arms dealer who was a CIA asset informs the agency that if the US were to sell arms to Iran for its ongoing war with Iraq, the Iranian government would in return use its influence with Lebanon to get American hostages held there released. This begins the "Iran-Contra" affair, as the proceeds of the already secret deal to sell Iran arms through Israel would eventually be used by Oliver North and Richard Secord to fund the Contras in Nicaragua.

1987 William H. Webster appointed twelfth Director.

The Iran-Contra scandal becomes public, and the sensational trial of Oliver North fascinates the nation. William Casey, who was known to have been a fervent supporter of the Contras and was believed to have been a key player in the conspiracy, inconveniently dies from nervous-system lymphoma before testifying.

1991 Robert M. Gates appointed thirteenth Director.

1993 R. James Woolsey appointed fourteenth Director.

1994 CIA officer Aldrich Ames is caught and exposed as a spy for the Soviets, having provided them with vast amounts of information in exchange for over \$2.7 million. At least 10 CIA agents within the USSR were killed due to information provided by Ames. Ames pleads guilty and is sentenced to life in prison.

1995 John M. Deutch appointed fifteenth Director. He is later dismissed after admitting he has brought home over 17,000 pages of classified information on his home computer, which is also used by his children to surf the Internet. Deutch becomes the first CIA Director to be stripped of his Top-Secret clearance level.

1997 George Tenet becomes sixteenth Director.

1999 An American B-2 drops two bombs on the Chinese embassy in Belgrade during a NATO airstrike. The CIA had selected the target, and at first the bombing was blamed on out-of-date maps that showed a Yugoslav government building on the site. Later evidence, primarily uncovered by the London newspaper The Observer, suggests that the strike may actually have been intentional, designed to send a warning message that the US knew that the Chinese were providing clandestine assistance to the Yugoslavs. The CIA undergoes yet another round of second-guessing in the press.

The Organization

CIA officers have a saying: "Our failures are publicized. Our successes are not." The popularity of this maxim says a great deal about the institutional character of the Agency. Americans have a natural bias against the secretive, and tend to assume anything they're not being told about must be bad. The CIA has probably earned a lot of its bad press, but it is certainly a source of frustration to veteran agents that so little mitigating information about the things they do right can be released.

The organizational ethos of the CIA demands, "Never apologize, never explain." The agency came late to the idea that good public relations could be a benefit, as the work of Hoover marketing the FBI had shown throughout the middle of the century, and the CIA has had an antagonistic relationship with the press throughout most of its existence. When the excesses of programs like Operation CHAOS were revealed in the mid-1970s, the CIA stonewalled vigorously and released information so slowly and haphazardly that it was pretty much guaranteed that the public would assume there was even worse to hide.

The other relevant organizational trait of the CIA is an apparent casual regard for legal process. Obviously, the CIA's primary mandate involves breaking the laws of other countries on a regular basis, in order to perform effective espionage. It would be, perhaps, easy to understand how an institution like that would find it difficult to avoid taking the laws of its own country somewhat lightly.

The CIA is forbidden by mandate from "exercising law enforcement or police powers or undertaking internal security functions." This reflects Truman's postwar fears of a American covert agency like the Nazi intelligence agencies or (later) the KGB. This does not mean, however, that the CIA cannot operate within the United States, as some would claim, but that the target of investigation must always be foreign, no matter where they may operate. The CIA may, for example, bug a foreign embassy on US soil, or investigate a foreign-owned and managed corporation operating in the US. When dealing with US citizens or corporations, by law CIA agents must identify themselves as such. It is generally believed that the CIA has a less-than-stellar record of following this law.

The end of the Cold War left the CIA in an operational quandary. Though few seriously believed the need for an intelligence agency had by any stretch passed, many felt that cutbacks were appropriate. The CIA dug in and resisted cost-cutting and trimming of their bloated payrolls, trying to emphasize their effectiveness in counterterrorism and narcotics interdiction. Unfortunately, neither of these is precisely a strength of the agency, and both are handled with greater effectiveness by other institutions. The CIA remains a favorite target during cost-cutting debates in Congress, though so far it has passed through the "budget wars" with little effect.

The investigations after the Ames spy case in 1994 painted a public picture of the CIA that was even less flattering. The complete inability to catch a spy so obviously living beyond his means and with such incompetent cover led many outside analysts to criticize the agency for excessive bureaucracy, a tendency to phase less competent officers to the counterintelligence services to cover their inadequacies and an excessive concern among middle management with padding their successes by maintaining ineffective assets. The post-Ames Directors of the CIA (especially Tenet) have pledged yet another shake-up of the agency, but so far few are impressed.

Structure and Mission

The Director of Central Intelligence (DCI) has an a breathtakingly complicated job, of which running the CIA is only a part. The DCI is responsible for providing foreign intelligence to the President, his cabinet, and the National Security Council. This intelligence may come from many sources other than the CIA itself; this organization of sources that eventually report to the DCI is known as the "Intelligence Community." The Intelligence Community officially consists of the following organizations: CIA, FBI, National Security Agency (NSA), National Imagery and Mapping Agency (NIMA), Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), National Reconnaissance Office (NRO), Department of Energy (DOE), Department of Treasury (DOT), Department of State, and the intelligence branches of the four branches of the military (Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marines).

It is the DCI's responsibility to coordinate the thirteen organizations above and receive intelligence from each of them, and then present that intelligence to the Executive Branch. In fact, the heads of each of these agencies meet regularly as the National Foreign Intelligence Board (NFIB), chaired by the DCI. It isn't in the scope of this article to explain or define all of the above agencies, but some of them may be dealt with in future pieces.

The DCI is appointed by the president and approved by the Senate. He is assisted by a Deputy Director of the CIA, also a presidential appointee, who also assists in coordinating the Intelligence Community.

The CIA itself is divided into four Directorates, each headed by a Deputy Director (DD), about which there is more below. There are seven other staff offices run by DDs: Public Affairs, Congressional Affairs, Comptroller, Special Assistant for Arms Control (which monitors other countries' compliance with strategic arms control treaties), National Intelligence Council (which produces economic estimates), Intelligence Community Staff, and Planning and Coordination. The General Counsel for the CIA is also equivalent to a DD in rank. Since 1990, the Inspector General of the CIA has technically had equal rank to the Director but remains out of the chain of command, due to his responsibilities for monitoring intelligence activities for legality.

The Directorate of Operations, also known as the Clandestine Service, is what the public thinks of as the "real" CIA, the home of spies and handlers. Officers of the DOO manage agents in countries all over the world (allies as well as enemies), collecting intelligence and performing covert operations. It is estimated that about 4,000 of the 22,000 employees of the CIA work for the DOO. Frequently DOO officers have covers as members of the State Department or a similar government post, since this allows them diplomatic immunity should they be exposed. Other officers have what is known as "commercial cover," or a cover identity as an employee of a private company. This is considered much riskier service.

It is important to differentiate here between officers and agents. In CIA parlance, an agent is a foreign national that has been recruited by the Agency to provide information covertly to the US. The term is never used to describe an actual American employee of the the CIA; in the field these are known as officers. This is probably the single most common error in fictional portrayals of the CIA.

The primary job of DOO officers is to recruit and manage agents, also sometimes called assets, who provide them with intelligence. Usually this involves bribes, though many agents are ideologically motivated. Officers use agents to acquire documents, record conversations, infiltrate buildings and disseminate information that the USA wants spread (either false information to other espionage agencies or propaganda to potential supporters.) DOO officers also oversee and occasionally perpetrate direct actions, such as physically stealing code keys or bugging embassies. The DOO also oversees counterterrorist and counterintelligence activities for the CIA (the latter function coordinated with the FBI), and provides assistance to the DEA and FBI in combating the international drug trade.

Next is the Directorate of Science and Technology (DS&T). This Directorate develops and distributes high-tech equipment to the agency, and monitors the development of science and technology in the private sector. They co-manage the entire fleet of intelligence satellites, along with the NRO and NIMA, and process the images gathered through the National Photographic Interpretation Center. Most of the US's surveillance satellites are built under the auspices of the DS&T's Office of Development and Engineering. DS&T also runs the SIGINT Operations office, monitoring radio transmissions and telemetry. The Office of Technical Services is famous for turning out state-of-the-art bugging devices disguised as a bewildering array of common household and personal devices, such as pens, lighters and batteries. The DS&T employs approximately 6,000 officers.

The Directorate of Intelligence represents the in-house analysis wing of the CIA, made up of foreign-policy experts, political scientists and military advisers charged with taking in the information gathered by the DOO and presenting the Executive Branch with their predictions and suggestions. There are at least a dozen specialized offices within the DOI, several dedicated to specific areas of the world and others devoted to the study of international trade, weapons research and social sciences. This branch is traditionally the most "open" within the CIA, with its analysts frequently publishing papers and attending symposia, and has a well-known rivalry with the "spooks" of the DOO. With only about 3,000 employees, it is the smallest of the four Directorates.

The last Directorate is Administration. The largest Directorate (9,000 employees), the DOA is responsible for all of the

"support services" required by the CIA, including finances, training, security, personnel, logistics and supply. The public communications offices are part of this directorate, as are the management of the Langley HQ (see below) and the remote training sites. The Financial Management office handles the laundering of money through banks and front businesses all over the world. DOA also is responsible for internal security, including background checks on employees and agents, polygraphs and debugging our own offices and embassies.

The CIA's main headquarters is an office complex in McLean, Virginia, called Langley after a smaller village that merged into McLean in the early 1900s. Located on wooded farmland near the Potomac River, it's a relatively small compound consisting primarily of two large office buildings, a domed 7,000-seat auditorium called "The Bubble," and a parking garage and several smaller outlying facilities. The area is fully fenced and patrolled by armed guards and dogs, but presents a low-key profile (and the local bus stops right at the main gate!). The "Old Building," which was the first and for some time the only building on the lot, is the location of the DCI's offices, as well as those of several other officials, the libraries, gym, two barber shops and the CIA's National Historical Collection, a museum of the Agency's history. Most of the "New Building" is given over to office space for the lower-level employees. Behind the New Building can be found the electrical substation, motor pool, helipad, emergency generators and the CIA's own post office. Behind the compound itself, just off the property, is a large commercial farm, where periodic escapes by razorback hogs bred there have frequently livened up the lives of guards along the CIA's perimeter.

The CIA's primary training facility is called Camp Peary, located near Williamsburg, VA on a 10,000-acre former WWII Naval training facility. Officially called the Special Training Center (STC), the CIA still does not officially acknowledge its existence, though it's something of an open secret. The DOO runs what is called the Basic Operations Course (BOC) here, which is required of all field officers before their first posting, and various advanced training programs like weapons and demolitions training, field surveillance, driving, infiltration and bugging. Agents of other intelligence services train here occasionally, primarily Military intelligence, although it is said that some programs are open to agents of our allies' intelligence services like the British SIS. The STC also serves as an auxiliary meeting/conference center to the sometimes undersized Langley facility.

The other major facility of the CIA is the Harvey Point Defense Testing facility, in Elizabeth City, NC. This location is considerably more secretive than Camp Peary, and little is known of the programs taught inside. It is generally accepted that "The Point" is the training site for the more paramilitary courses taught by the CIA, as opposed to Camp Peary's "sneaky skills." Harvey Point is where courses in high explosives, hostage rescue, sabotage and similar activities are taught. The base is also used for training by Navy SEALs and occasionally the Secret Service.

CIA Officers in GURPS

Unlike the FBI, there is no set package for officers of the CIA. There is simply far too wide a variety of operational backgrounds, and no uniform training programs that all officers take. Instead, a list of suggested skills for officer types is included below.

A typical CIA "case officer," or spy handler living abroad, would have a cover identity established for him by the Agency. As mentioned above, this is frequently as a member of the State Department or ambassadorial staff, in order to take advantage of the protections of diplomatic immunity should the agent be captured or exposed. This is the 10-pt. "Alternate Identity" listed on CI20, along with the 15-pt. "Legal Enforcement Powers" advantage from B21. Please note that CIA officers do not have the authority to arrest anyone or "kill with relative impunity," except when under direct Executive Order from the President to do so. The CIA itself is a 30-pt. Patron, but also attaches a Duty (Almost all the time), and for case officers a 10-point "Secret" as well. This nets to 15 points as an advantage.

Appropriate advantages for a case officer include: Alertness, Charisma (perhaps quite a lot!), Cultural Adaptability, Danger Sense, Empathy, Intuition, Night Vision, and Voice. Popular disadvantages might include: Gregarious, Lecherousness, and Overconfidence. Skills could include Acting, Bugging, Diplomacy, Electronics Operation, History (perhaps specializing in Political History), Intelligence Analysis, Savoir Faire, Sex Appeal, Shadowing, SIGINT Collection, Stealth, several appropriate languages, Area Knowledge (current and former postings) and sufficient professional skills to maintain his cover identity. Most officers are trained at the very least with pistols and some basic

self-defense skills as well.

Of course, there are numerous other jobs within the CIA, from paramilitary specialists to hardcore hackers, but these should be easy to generate for anyone familiar with the *GURPS* system.

Further Reading and References

- <http://www.cia.gov> -- The Agency's homepage, with numerous links for historical documents and related sites. Not terribly informative, but an interesting read anyway.
- <http://www.intellit.muskingum.edu> -- An outstanding bibliography, maintained by a professor at Muskingum College in Ohio, featuring publications, books and magazine articles on government intelligence issues.
- <http://www.CNN.com/SPECIALS/cold.war> -- CNN's documentary series included a number of excellent interviews and retrospectives on the architects of the Cold War, including several of the CIA's top officials of the period.
- <http://www.rrojasdatabank.org/ciahist.html> -- A scathing analysis of the CIA's involvement in third-world countries from the 1940s to the 1980s.
- <http://www.britannica.com> - As always, the greatest straight research site on the web.
- *Inside The CIA* (Ronald Kessler, Pocket Books, 1992) -- Kessler is a bit of an apologist for the CIA in some cases, and the book is now somewhat out-of-date. Nevertheless, he was granted unprecedented access to the day-to-day operation of the Agency, and the book is informative and easy to read.
- *The Big Book of Conspiracies* (Doug Moench and various artists, Paradox Press, 1995) -- Your one-stop shop for illustrated, breezy beginner theories on the weird, the secret, and the mind-blowing. The bibliography covers pretty much all the standard texts in modern Conspiracy Theory. If your campaign involves the Weird CIA, here's a good place to start.



by Greg DeAngelo

Grunting as he adjusts the heft of his lance, Liam pulls hard on the reigns and his mount turns sharply in reply, circling around to face their foe. The rapid, familiar beating of the roc's heart resonates strong and sure, and the knight's own heart swells with pride that his bird fights on, despite the terrible gash in its leg torn open by the angry beak of the rival gryphon. "Let drop your lance, and I will let you fly off, good sir knight," the challenging voice echoes across the clouds.

A huge golden feather drifts downward in a lazy spiral.

A kick of the spurs is Liam's only reply, and his roc gathers speed, swooping in a tight arc towards the charging gryphon. The quiet of the silent sky is broken by the battle cries of the flying mounts, 1000 feet above the clashing armies below.

The Royal Air Corps

Whether an integral part of the King's standing army or a honor bearing company of Royal Guardians, being part of a squadron of dashing, daring sky knights offers a new type of challenge. Having a PC with a flying mount is no longer unbalancing -- it's the norm!

The Mounts

Common fantastic mounts include the pegasus, the gryphon, and the roc. Pegasi are stable mounts, somewhat slower than their counterparts. They are the favorite among airborne archers. Winged horses are also prized by marines and assault teams -- not only for their ability to move easily on the ground but also because they are not easily spooked. Gryphon are fierce air-to-air fighters with a devastating array of natural weaponry. Heavy airborne cavalry and lance units are usually made up of flights of gryphon, the lion's body easily supporting the weight of the barding protecting the hawk's head. In contrast, the roc is small, fast, maneuverable, and deadly. These giant birds are favored by light lance, light cavalry, and scouts. The speed of the roc makes it highly valued as an interceptor; they are able to engage enemy knights before the bad guys get close enough to threaten stationary or vulnerable targets with ranged or magical attacks.

Mages, seers, and generals typically require much more stable mounts. Balloons powered by magical winds (see Brinni's Balloon, p. MIT108), flying carpets (p. MI83), and floating ships (p. MI85) can all be used, although such devices are susceptible to attack without a fighter escort.

The Pilots

The sky knights are part chivalrous defenders of the crown and part cocky, cinematic aviators. How far the player characters can swing in either direction depends on how the GM wants to work the setting into the campaign. Realistic

settings such as GURPS Fantasy's Yrth probably demand a more sober character, sworn to an order of flying knights. A more cinematic campaign is just begging for hot-shot Hollywood-style sky knights with "Top Gun" attitudes.

Fantastic sky knights share many characteristics of later aviators, but their skills are solidly based in medieval weaponry and armor. (See *GURPS Warriors* for a full treatment of the Aviator and Aristocratic Warrior/Knight character types.) Acute Vision, Combat Reflexes, Danger Sense, Absolute Direction, Charisma, and Reputation are all typical advantages. Sky knights, however, are often Overconfident, Intolerant (of ground forces), or Impulsive. If the campaign strays towards the cinematic, then Glory Hound, Loner, Stubbornness, and Bad Temper are fun choices for disadvantages. Depending on the campaign, an appropriate Code of Honor, Sense of Duty, Patron, or Enemy might be required.

Skills reflect the tech level of the period, and include trade skills (Armoury and Blacksmith) as well as combat skills (Lance and Bow). Social skills vary widely, ranging from Savoir Faire to Leadership. Don't forget Riding (Flying Mount), a Physical/Average skill but one that comes with a hefty -10 modifier. These are no "ordinary" riding creatures! (See p. B46.)

Whichever route the players and GM choose, there's plenty of action to be had in the skies. And on the ground.

Air Corps Bases

The sky knights do not fly in a vacuum. The typical air corps base is a bustling center of activity, a small city that is part fortification and part farm.

Defenses

In contrast to castles and walled cities, the air corps base is not designed to withstand a siege. Defenders will take to the sky rather than seek cover behind barricades of wood, stone, or earth. If the front lines of the campaign get too close to the base, mission critical personnel will simply be evacuated.

The nature of their missions places an emphasis on mobility in the air corps. Many times, the sky knights will not even be operating out of their home base. Temporary shelters can easily be erected; indeed, an air unit can be housed on the fly in any farming community with adequate stable space, ample feed, and cooperative locals. Of course, obtaining the cooperation of the locals in a war-torn region can be an adventure in itself.

The air corps base, therefore, is defended by restricting access to sensitive areas. In general, this means that the closer you get to the mounts, the tighter the security. Fences or light wooden walls control casual access to the base itself, with sturdier, patrolled walls closer to the stables. Ground forces equivalent to city guards will tightly patrol the areas near the stables, and may even be authorized to use deadly force upon discovering unauthorized personnel. It may be trivial for a thief or spy to sneak onto the base, but obtaining unauthorized access to the stables is another matter altogether.

(This type of limited access installation with layered defenses is discussed in the *Pyramid* article ["A Wall Sufficient to Defend."](#) That article also discusses aerial combat at traditional fantasy castles, and it is recommended reading for aspiring sky knights.)

Community

Even a modestly sized squadron will require significant amounts of feed for the mounts. This will necessitate a farming community, if supplies are not brought in from external sources. In addition, the base will house at least one blacksmith and one leatherworker to maintain horseshoes, saddles, and the like. If the sky knights do not possess armoury skills themselves, then several armorers will also be stationed at the base. Many times, especially at smaller bases, the knights and their squires will wear several hats, servicing their equipment and caring for their mounts between missions.

The community surrounding a medium or large base will doubtlessly include animal trainers, entertainers, and merchants, not to mention the spouses and family of the military personnel. No matter how small, all bases have an appropriately named tavern (The Belching Gryphon, Aces High, Cloud Nine). A large base can actually grow into a small city as wages and supplies are funneled into the base from royal coffers. As the sons of the farmers and tradespeople mature, the air base itself remains important to the city but may soon cease to be the sole reason the city exists.

Culture

From the bird seed merchant specializing in high-protein roc grain to the blacksmith's apprentice sweating out a horseshoe over a blackened anvil, everything at an air corps base exists to one end -- getting the pilots in the air as often as possible. All the attention is focused on the knights. The sky knights themselves exude a certain calm confidence; a combination of skill and talent and luck has landed them the opportunity of a lifetime.

Naturally, this pilot-dominated culture fosters a touch of an elitist attitude in the pilots themselves. Jealousy and resentment from traditional ground forces are not uncommon. During war time campaigns, scuffles and fights are frequent when sky knight squadrons are assigned to temporary positions near the front lines and are sharing tavern space and commandeered quarters with other knights. (Tavern-busting, street-sprawling fisticuffs between orders of knights may stretch the credibility of chivalry, but they're really much too fun to pass up in this setting.)

Even among pilots, fierce rivalry is not uncommon. Pilots strive to be the best, to be recognized as the First Wing in their squadron. Pilots of different mounts often tend to think of themselves as the "true" sky knights. This is especially endemic among roc pilots. Roc are smaller, faster, and more maneuverable; they are also more difficult to control than other flying mounts. Combat is usually closer and more intense on the back of a swooping roc. While gryphon and pegasus pilots are respected, they are often not viewed as having the Right Stuff. Well, at least not the same kind of Right Stuff as the roc jocks.

Placing The Pilots In The Campaign

Occurrence

Just how common are these flying forces, anyway? The answer to that question sets the tone of the campaign, and should be at least somewhat established before getting into the adventures. It is unlikely that every knight in the land possesses a flying mount. But if sufficient numbers exist, then airborne forces will play a key role in military campaigns, fortification design, and the like. If flying mounts are rare, then they will still play an important role as scouts and observers in combat-oriented games (and as honor guards and spies in settings with more courtly intrigue). If the flying mounts are *secret*, then the goal becomes accomplishing the above objectives while maintaining the secrecy.

Organization

A standing military airborne force is probably organized by type of mount. Pegasi, gryphon, and roc require different types of feed, tack, training, and barding. But at the same time, it is often advantageous to have the varying skills of the different mounts available by placing them at the same base.

To balance these concerns, mounts are separated into units. The smallest unit is the Flight, which consists of five to ten knights. A Squadron consists of three or four Flights (20 to 30 knights) and is typically made up of one type of mount. Squadrons are organized into Wings of 100 to 150 knights. If sufficient numbers exist, an Air Force can be created with several Wings.

The rank and title of the Flight, Squadron, Wing, and Air Force Commanders depend on the setting, of course. A Wing Commander may have less than 200 knights under her command, but could rank alongside a Duchess in military concerns (at least in Caithness). A good rule of thumb is to determine the appropriate rank for a commander of a

similar number of ground forces, and then adjust rank upwards by one.

The mid-sized air corps base can house two or three squadrons. Like taverns, squadron names are often colorful and telling. The 15th Air Cavalry Squadron goes by the "Corvairs." The 22nd Tactical Roc Fighter Squadron is better known as the "Double Deuce." The 23rd Air Surveillance Squadron is spoken of in hushed tones as "The Third Eye."

Adventure Seeds

The Red Wing Academy

"So, son, do you have what it takes to go against the best of the best?" Forty-eight weeks of the year, the skies above Mirror Lake are full of all manner of flying mounts and cocksure knights. These aerial combatants train, fly, and compete in conditions ranging from open sky to cloudbusting monsoons. The top pilots from each of the King's squadrons are hand-selected to attend this prestigious school. The trainers at the Red Wing Academy are the finest pilots in the kingdom, their equipment is unparalleled, and their mounts are legendary. Competition for the top score is fierce among the students, but by the end of the grueling twelve-week session, most knights are happy just to graduate.

Adventures at Mirror Lake involve lots and lots of flying. Get your sky knights into the air early and often. Gloss over training sessions, unless there's some intrigue brewing along those lines. (A rival pilot is attempting to gain the favor of instructors to tip the scoring in his favor, or maybe a potential love affair is blossoming with an attractive female teacher.) The PC's will get beat, handily, by the instructors - at least at first.

Safety is stressed from the very first briefing. The instructors emphasize the rules of the competition continuously. Weapons are blunted or wooden versions. Stables where the mounts are kept are secured around the clock. Mages are present to keep the safety equipment charged with mana and operating correctly. (Hint: test your ring of feather fall before you get bucked off your gryphon at 1500 feet.) All of these precautions can be circumvented, of course, by the unscrupulous rival to the PC knight, especially if the devious skunk is running a close second behind the hero in the standings for the Top Lance trophy.

And when the competition is over, the winners are given their choice of assignments. A rare few are invited to continue honing their skills by becoming instructors at the Red Wing Academy.

Scramble!

"Alert! Alert! Incoming bogies! To your mounts! To your mounts!" The peaceful slumber of the sky knights is suddenly interrupted by the squawking voice of a lookout or guard. The enemy is not just approaching -- the enemy is here! The nature of the enemy depends on the campaign, of course. Wyverns and dragons from the air, an approaching host of goblin wolf-riders, or a marauding band of human raiders are all good choices if the kingdom is not at war. Enemy troops, sky-mounted or not, are appropriate during wartime. A practice raid from friendly airborne troops is a great wake-up call in times of peace. (Try springing a surprise attack on the PC's while they're still getting their dice together and planning the toppings for the pizza.)

Take into account the amount of preparations for this sort of activity your players have made. If they have arranged for continuous surveillance from clairvoyant mages and a system of alarm, the enemy has been spotted with plenty of time to secure the gates and get the mounts airborne. If this is the first time the players have even considered an attack on the base, then perhaps they are awoken by the crash of catapults or ballistae as the perimeter fence is being breached!

In any case, time is of the essence. Quick, decisive action can mean the difference between routing the enemy, successfully implementing a fighting withdrawal, or confused chaos resulting in disaster.

Crossover Campaigns

Technomancer

Roc-mounted sky knights versus supersonic fighters? Even by equipping the sky knights with state-of-the-art weaponry, this is hardly a fair match. But the fantastic mounts have some advantages over their ultratech counterparts. Fantasy mounts are silent and present a much lower radar profile, perfect for reconnaissance teams or special forces. Their feed can be grown in any temperate climate, and their upkeep does not require electricity or modern equipment. This can be a huge advantage in areas where supplies are tight or unavailable. In addition, they are immune to the effects of an electromagnetic pulse. With the enemy's sophisticated radar equipment, maintenance facilities, ammunition supplies, and counterstrike ability in shambles, the non-electronic sky knights can swoop down in the aftermath of an EMP.

Swashbucklers

Put a squadron of roc and gryphon on a modified frigate, add a forge and some extra room for the mounts and their crews, load up with a six month's supply of grain, and what do you have? A medieval carrier, ready to strike fear into the hearts of every coastal city. Pirates would certainly prize the capture of a carrier, and if they could convince some of the sky knights to desert and join them, no ship would be safe from plunder. If you're picturing pitched duels on rolling decks, flashing blades on deck, in the rigging, and in the air, billowing sails against a backdrop of magical fireballs and lightning bolts, then you've just about got it. Add a touch of courtly intrigue in the form of letters of dispensation and a fair maiden or two (daughters of a rich noble, no doubt) to rescue, and you've got a swashbuckling, free-flying adventure to write home about.

Cliffhangers

A small team of sky knights on a long-term mission to recover several artifacts from locales inaccessible from the ground. Cave openings near the tops of active volcanoes. Floating castles. Hidden jungle clearings hundreds of miles from civilization. The temple complex atop the Cliffs of Insanity. Time is of course a factor, as is competition from rival kingdoms and mercenary aerial corps.

Other Flying Mounts

Shake up the campaign by introducing rival airborne armies attacking atop giant dragonflies. Or stone-throwing, club-wielding barbarian Pteranodon riders. Or upgrade your squadron to hippogriffs, keeping them carefully segregated from the flights of gryphon. Or didn't your knights know they don't mix well? Once you get airborne, the fun is just beginning.

Because after all, the sky's the limit.

Appendix: *GURPS* Statistics for Flying Mounts

Pegasus

ST 40, DX 14, IQ 7, HT 15

Move 20 Dodge 10

PD 1, DR 1

Size 3, Weight 1100 lbs.

Move 16 with light enc, Move 12 with medium enc., Move 14 on ground.

Cannot fly with heavy enc.

No natural aerial attacks.

Roc

ST 30, DX 14, IQ 4, HT 13/20

Move 25 Dodge 7

PD 1, DR 1

Size 2, Weight 350 lbs.

Can fly at Move 8, can run on the ground at speed 3.

Two claw attacks at 1 + 2 cutting, one impaling beak attack at 2 + 1.

Gryphon

ST 35, DX 14, IQ 5, HT 15/25

Move 15 Dodge 7

PD 1, DR 1

Size 2, Weight 600 lbs.

Move 11 with light enc, no flight at medium enc. or above, Move 6 on ground.

Four claw attacks at 2 1 cutting and one beak attack at 2 + 1 impaling.

El Santo: The Man, The Myth, The Mask

by Darren Watts

"In a world without rules, where wickedness reigns, appears a force for good in the form of a man with the power to defeat all that is evil. Santo, the Man in the Silver Mask, as vulnerable as any mortal, fights against beings from beyond the grave -- fantastic creatures that surge forth from the legends and overflowing imaginations of man and his fears. Always surrounded by beautiful women and intrepid allies, the Masked Man carries us into an unlikely world, defying the limits of reality . . . "

-- From the *Legend of Santo*, by El Hijo del Santo (translated by Darren Watts)

Pit your heroes against El Santo, the king of the Mexican masked wrestlers, or aid him in his never-ending battle against B-movie menaces! Below you'll find a brief history of Lucha Libre and a complete write-up of El Santo, the Man in the Silver Mask, suitable for *GURPS Atomic Horror* or any campaign with a taste for the extreme.

Lucha Libre and the Legend of El Santo

In 1933, a Mexican promoter named Salvador Lutteroth saw several exhibitions of professional wrestling while traveling in Texas. In some ways very similar to the modern melodramatic spectacle familiar to cable-viewers, wrestling then was already a fixed "exhibition" rather than a sport, with heroes, called "babyfaces," and villains, or "heels." Though wrestling in the USA wouldn't reach its heights of national popularity until television spread it across the nation in the 1950s, it was already a popular attraction live throughout the southwest. Lutteroth, who'd promoted boxing and races, brought the idea to Mexico City. He loved the broad, operatic action, and encouraged his heels, known in Mexico as *rudos*, to play to the crowd even more dramatically than the Americans, and the local fans ate it up. Crowds of tens of thousands would attend the weekly matches, screaming and cheering on their heroes. Lutteroth called it Lucha Libre, or "free fighting."

Lutteroth introduced ongoing storylines from week to week. Personalities were developed for the *rudos*, frequently representing the various afflictions the Mexican poor suffered from. Every week the "good guys" were menaced by *rudos* in the form of bullies and devils, tax collectors and Texas Rangers. The good guys, or *tecnicos* (so named because a hallmark of the heroic wrestlers was skill over strength, with an impressive array of complicated holds and acrobatic maneuvers allowing them to defeat the thuggish *rudos*), became national heroes and their fame spread across the country. And the greatest of all the *tecnicos* was El Santo.

El Santo was not the first masked wrestler; individual wrestlers had been hiding their identities as part of the ongoing drama since the earliest matches, most notably the villainous Murcielaga ("The Bat"). But El Santo was a hero, a *tecnico*. Born Rudolph Guzman Huerta somewhere around 1917, he was one of three wrestling brothers in the early 1940s. After limited success early on in his career, he drew inspiration from the Dumas novel *The Man In The Iron Mask* (and the 1939 movie, which was tremendously popular in Mexico) and developed a masked heroic persona. With his easily identifiable silver mask, flamboyant style and natural charm, El Santo became far and away the most popular wrestler in Mexico. He traveled across the nation, wrestling in large arenas and small-town fairs, always mixing with the people, never revealing his true face. He gave countless public speeches about fair play and courage, and stood with his brother *tecnicos* like El Rayo de Jalisco ("The Jalisco Thunderbolt"), Mil Mascaras ("The Man of A Thousand Masks") and El Demonio Azul ("The Blue Demon") as a sort of wrestling Justice League, battling the nefarious *rudos*.

It's difficult to explain to Americans the size of his cultural impact; perhaps the public persona of John Wayne comes closest. El Santo crossed generational and cultural boundaries, representing in the Mexican mind the greatest virtues of their national character. There were TV and radio specials, comic books, and, beginning in 1958, over fifty movies starring El Santo. In most of these he was portrayed as not only a wrestling champion, but an all-purpose patriotic crimefighter, taking time out from his busy schedule of matches to thwart mad scientists, vampires, mummies, werewolves, and mobsters. Though some are difficult to find today, many of these movies remain bizarre treasures,

with wild and woolly action sequences, wooden acting, improbable plots and ludicrous dialogue. (In many of the American dubbed versions of these, El Santo's name is changed to "Samson.") El Santo finally retired from active wrestling in 1982, unmasking on a television special and turning his mantle over to his son, El Hijo del Santo (who still wrestles today). El Santo died in 1984, but left a brilliant legacy.

El Santo in GURPS

"He's not only a wrestler, he's kind of a crimefighter."

-- Cop, in *Santo vs. the Zombies*

El Santo is described in **GURPS** terms below at the height of his career, in the late 1950s and early 1960s, when the best of his movies were released. El Santo can be used as a campy action hero battling the supernatural in any **Horror** or **Atomic Horror** campaign. (Although he frequently fights the undead of various stripes, frequently the zombies and mummies come from a scientific background, having been raised as an unholy army by a mad scientist of some sort using bizarre technology.) Certainly agents of the TSF from **Atomic Horror** should be entertainingly nonplused by a gigantic masked Mexican already on the scene pummeling aliens left and right when they arrive on the scene.

A campaign where the PCs are all masked wrestlers fighting crime and monsters can be a hoot; the popular *tecnicos* frequently guest-starred in each other's movies, and some of the best featured the unique team of El Santo, the suave Mil Mascaras, and the grouchy Blue Demon. It's important to capture the feel of these movies -- there is an easy camaraderie among the heroes reminiscent of the Rat Pack days of Sinatra, Martin, and Davis. The heroes drive great cars (El Santo has an excellent Aston-Martin in several movies, and a Bentley in several others), live in splendid mansions (frequently with secret cave headquarters beneath), and think nothing of entering a bar in three-piece suits and wrestling masks, ordering a drink and having the most beautiful women approach them . . . and neither does anyone else! The police who aren't corrupt in these movies (and not a few of them are) gladly welcome the assistance of these noble crimefighters. As for the villains, any horror types will do, heavy on the mad science, and keeping in mind that, much like the world of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, straightforward physical violence works remarkably well against the undead. A slightly beefed-up version of El Santo might fit well in a **Supers** campaign as well.

The other possible use for masked Mexican wrestlers is to spice up a more realistic campaign. It's frequently entertaining in the right sort of game to introduce a character who believes he's in another genre entirely, like the costumed superhero who used to appear on Hill Street Blues. Though the PCs in an *Illuminated* game may think The Masked Phantom is insane when he tries to tell them about the zombie menace he's battling, they'll have to struggle with the inevitable paranoid question, "What if he's right?"

El Santo (Rodolfo Guzman Huerta)

Born 1917 (?); died 1984.

Presented here in his early 40s, at the height of his popularity but slightly before most of his movies. Despite his advancing age, Santo remained a successful and popular wrestler well into his sixties. El Santo is never seen in public without his trademark silver mask, which covers his entire head and laces up the back. The eyeholes are teardrop-shaped. When he knows he'll be eating in public, he wears a special version of his mask with an open chin. When wrestling, he wears full leggings but leaves his massive chest bare, and wears a silver cape to and from the ring. Otherwise, he dresses in stylish suits or leisure wear.

ST 16 [80] **DX** 14 [45] **IQ** 10 [-] **HT** 15 [60]

Move 7 Speed 7.25

Dodge 7 Parry 12 (h-t-h)

Advantages: Wealth (Comfortable) [10], Reputation (Wrestling Champion and Hero of the People, +3 to all Mexicans) [7], Charisma +1 [5], Composed [5], High Pain Threshold [10], Night Vision [10], Strong Will +3 [12], Trained By A Master [40]

Disadvantages: Code of Honor (Tecnico -- Never break your word; Never allow yourself to be unmasked; Always defend the weak and helpless; Never use questionable tactics in combat, like low blows, attacking from behind, etc., unless your opponent does so first) [10], Enemy (Rudo wrestlers, 9-) [15], Honesty [10], Sense of Duty (Common people of Mexico) [10]

Quirks: Always wears his silver mask, even in socially inappropriate settings; Has an eye for the ladies; Loves items of luxury despite neo-socialist tendencies; Especially loves convertible sportscars and expensive food; Prone to melodramatic speeches. [5]

Skills: Acrobatics-15 [8], Brawling-18 [16], Wrestling-20 [40], Karate-14 [4], Guns-13 [1/2], Cooking-11 [2], Mechanic (Gas Engines)-11 [4], First Aid-10 [1], Carousing-13 [default], Leadership-14 [default], Performance-9 [1], Escape-12 [1], Electronics Ops (Super-TV)-12 [6], Occultism-11 [4], Shadowing-10 [2], Stealth-13 [1], Streetwise-10 [2], Driving-13 [1], Lucha Libre Rules & History-15 [10], Maneuver: Arm/Wrist Lock-21 [1/2], Breakfall-15 [default], Drop Kick-18 [1], Head Butt-14 [1], Jump Kick-14 [6], Stamp Kick-15 [4]

Points: 350

Description: El Santo is the foremost Lucha Libre wrestler of his time. He never appears in public without his mask, despite the fact that his real name and identity are public knowledge. At different times he holds various championship belts, including the National Middleweight title throughout most of the 1950s, and the Tag-Team belt with his partner Gory Guerrero under the name of Pareja Atomica ("The Atomic Duo.") He has a son, born around 1955, but his mother remains unknown. Presumably she raised him, since the son's existence is not made public until the late 1970s.

Apart from his responsibilities as wrestling champion, the fictional El Santo is an unofficial aide to the local police of Mexico City and occasionally also the Army. Both will frequently turn to him when they are stumped by bizarre occurrences, reports of supernatural creatures, or threats by the occasional mad scientist (of which Mexico seems to have more than its fair share). El Santo also has a wide range of friends, any of whom may involve him in a strange adventure; it frequently seems that his entire social circle is made up of wrestlers, beautiful actresses and scientists!

El Santo maintains a cave beneath his mansion for his battles against evil, equipped with an impressive television system years ahead of its time that gives him a direct line to Police Headquarters.

El Santo has little use for tactical thinking most of the time; he tends to charge headlong into situations counting on his physical ability and resolute courage to see him through. He is always willing to face any menace, no matter how dire, if it threatens innocents.

Notes

- Friends and frequent partners Blue Demon and Mil Mascaras are not listed as Allies, since it seems likely to me that they are also PC types, and though they are prone to call on each other for assistance on occasion they still appear too infrequently to be Allies. El Hijo del Santo could be added as an Ally later, when Santo himself is in his sixties.
- El Santo has a remarkable facility for being on the scene when a mad scientist, evil mage, or vampire begins his reign of terror. Some GMs may wish to reflect this with levels of Luck or the like, but here he has been portrayed as a PC in a campaign universe with a high level of coincidence in general.
- All of the combat skills listed assume that Lucha Libre is real, and the fights are not scripted or choreographed, though a certain amount of "playing to the crowd" is expected. GMs wishing to use El Santo for some role in a high-realism campaign may wish to replace the bulk of his combat skills with, say, Stage Combat at a high level.

Pyramid Review

The Black Circle: Unholy Alliance (for Deadlands)

Published by [Pinnacle Entertainment Group](#)



Written by John Goff

\$20.00

The *Black Circle: Unholy Alliance*, written by John Goff for Pinnacle Entertainment Group, details three of the Weird West's major villains, their organizations, and the far reaching conspiracy that loosely ties the three together. Although set in Weird West, this sourcebook is not just for those who play *Deadlands*. Any game in need of a far-ranging conspiracy or a set of ready-made of villains will find useful material in this well written sourcebook. While most of this book is designed with gamemasters in mind, a section detailing Blood Magic for player character members of the Whatley clan provides advanced players with an intriguing new option for their games.

The members of the Unholy Alliance are the Black River and Bayou Vermillion Railroads, two of the major players in the *Great Rail Wars*, and the Whatley family, originally introduced in the *Doomtown* collectable card game and *Doomtown or Bust* supplement. More recently, the Whateleys have been major players in the latest three-part series of adventures by Pinnacle Entertainment Group (*Ghost Busters*, *Rain o' Terror*, and the forthcoming *Dead Presidents*). Neither the *Great Rail Wars* miniatures game nor any of the abovementioned supplements or adventures are necessary to understand or use *The Black Circle*, which is designed as a stand-alone supplement. Those already possessing these supplements will find both explanations for these villains' prior actions and a few surprises about their current motivations.

Each of the three groups is given equal space, and Marshals will find details about the major players as well as general information about their organization. While some of this material can be found in other supplements (Information about Bayou Vermillion's activities in New Orleans, for example, can be found in the *River o' Blood* boxed set.), repeated information is minimal and, in all cases, necessary to explain the current activities of each group. This repetition does have the advantage of making *The Black Circle* a one-stop source for Marshals searching for information about these groups. Finally, each section provides both the motivations (if not always the statistics) for the major players, and their modus operandi and resources available for dealing with inquisitive player characters.

Perhaps the strongest part of the sourcebook is the continental scope given to Bayou Vermillion, Black River, and the Whatley family. In prior supplements, which focused on places rather than organizations, each of the groups were examined piecemeal. *Doomtown or Bust*, for example, detailed the Whatley clan's activities in the town of Gomorra. *The Black Circle* introduces other branches of the Whatley clan, not all of whom are named Whatley, and their activities and bases of operations in New England, New Jersey, and Nevada in addition to updating the family's activities in Gomorra and Ghost Creek, California.

Players with the desire to create characters with a Lovecraftian flavor will love the new Blood Magic rules. This new Arcane Background, available to members of any branch of the Whatley family, gives players access to a dangerous, disturbing, and interesting selection of spells and abilities. The use of Blood Magic, however, does not come without a price. The more magic is used, the greater the chance the player character will give into his family's dark destiny. Marshals are recommended to weigh carefully whether or not they wish to allow players to have access to this material. This warning has more to do with the necessary inclusion of the Whatley clan as a major presence rather than an unbalancing power level.

It should also be noted that this book provides the first official information about the mysterious figure known only as

the Cackler, a lich more frightening than Stone from before the time of the Great Spirit War that locked the Reckoners away during the Middle Ages.

The book is not without its flaws. There are occasional printing oddities, causing letters to overlap in some of the headings. There is also one internal contradiction, although this does not effect anything on a practical level (The Reckoners are said to not care who wins the Rail Wars at one point and, at another, it states they have already chosen the one they want to win). This being said, these minor errors do not detract from the overall quality of the work.

With the upcoming release of *GURPS Deadlands* and *Deadlands d20*, this information is easily translatable into other systems. As such, is worth considering for those who play *GURPS*, *Castle Falkenstein*, *Deadlands*, *Space 1889*, and other systems set in a Steampunk setting. *Call of Cthulhu* players may also find material of use here, given the presence of the Whatley clan. Conversion rules for translating between *Deadlands* and *Call of Cthulhu* may be found in Pinnacle Entertainment Group's Dime Novel *Adios A-Migos*. Those not using the Weird West, Steampunk, or Lovecraftian settings may want to look carefully at the book before purchasing it. The villains, especially the Whatley clan, make excellent villains in any setting but the work converting them into a Space Opera or High Fantasy game would be substantial.

In short, *The Black Circle: Unholy Alliance* is an excellent purchase for gamemasters and players interested in creating characters with the Blood Magic Arcane Background. Non-Deadlands Steampunk gamemasters who want to include a horror or conspiracy feel to their game can find much that is useful in this supplement.

--*Matthew DeForrest*

Pyramid Review

The Spear of the Lohgin (for d20)

Published by [Paradigm Concepts](#)



Written by Jarad Fennell

Illustrated by Manuel Aguiera, Paul Carrick,
Veronica Jones, Jim Pavelec and Derek Stevens

32 pages; \$9.99

The Spear of the Lohgin is the first release from Paradigm Concepts, one of the latest publisher to take advantage of the Open Gaming License and do scenarios for *d20*. This is the first part of a trilogy that Paradigm Concepts calls the Canceri Chronicles, and is designed for four to six characters of levels four through six.

Written by Jarad Fennell, this is done in the standard thirty-two-page format behind a cover by Brom. It may not be the most impressive of Brom paintings, but at least marks a sense of professional quality, and sets a nice tone for the adventure without giving anything away. Inside the layout is clear and competent, with only the occasional inconsistency. Unfortunately, the appearance of *The Spear of the Lohgin* has two main teething problems. First, the art is inconsistent. Second, the maps are terrible. These have been designed using ProFantasy Software's *Campaign Cartographer 2*, but not to the polished standard we have seen in other recent *d20* adventures. Here the maps suffer from being bitmapped, or have items that are arranged in fashion that is too regular a pattern upon the eye, or indeed suffer from both problems.

Nor is the writing entirely immune from problems. Some of the boxed flavor text designed to be read out to the players is . . . well, lacking a little in flavor. It also occasionally includes details that the players are not meant to hear, but rather discover in the course of that encounter. Thankfully, the DM can rectify this latter problem as the adventure progresses.

[SPOILER ALERT]

The setting for *The Spear of the Lohgin* is the nation of Malandir. Both it and its rival nation, Canceri, are former provinces of the Coryani Empire on Onara, the main continent of the lush world of Arcanis. A plague has recently struck the town of "New" Ashvan and the local Duke asks the party to visit the town and report back to him with the extent of the damage. Whilst there, bandits stage a raid and carry off a religious artefact. As agents of the Duke, the surviving townspeople look to the party for their help in recovering it.

The trail leads them deep into a blighted, disease-ridden swamp at the heart of which lies the ruined home of the Lohgin family, the former knight-protectors of New Ashvan. It quickly becomes apparent that priests of Neroth, the god of disease and the undead that is worshipped in neighboring Canceri. The artefact is actually the haft of the Spear of the Lohgin, the point of which is impaled upon a half-summoned demon, thus preventing it from entering this world.

[SPOILER OVER]

Although the plot of the adventure is the sort of thing we have seen before, it is handled most competently, if not without a little polish. One nice touch is that although Neroth is the god of disease and the undead, his worshippers are

not portrayed as being all-evil. One further aspect of the maps is that the one of the final encounter which takes place in the Lohgin family keep, does not look like a that of a dwelling. Instead it is laid out as if it were a simple dungeon. It is a pity that the map betrays what the text is describing.

Where this adventure is clever is in its construction. The author claims that *The Spear of the Lohgin* can be customized according to the needs of the DM and also be adapted to fit into any already existing campaigns. The adventure is constructed around encounters defined as either Hard or Soft Points. A Hard Point is a necessary encounter that advances the plot. A Soft Point is not-so-needed, but instead provides further information that adds color to the plot being built by the Hard Points. Soft Points are more flexible and thus more easily altered than Hard Points, allowing the DM to insert their own campaign elements. As the adventure progresses so do the number of Hard Points, leading to the final series of encounters that are all Hard.

Apart from the clever concept of Hard and Soft Points, *The Spear of the Lohgin* offers a reasonably well-written adventure with a dark flavor that comes primarily from the setting and its history. Although it can be played on its own, and an ending is provided for that, it works better if the DM is planning to run the sequel, *The Blood Reign of Nishanpur*. The ending provided for this ties the characters in the adventure setting with a reason to stay, as well as worthy rewards. Overall, this is a decent adventure that, given its teething problems, will require a small amount of work by the DM. One hopes that the sequel, *The Blood Reign of Nishanpur*, will not suffer from them too.

--Matthew Pook

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--Matthew Pook

All Shook Up: Reality Quakes

"[F]or since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation . . . But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Nevertheless we . . . look for new heavens and a new earth . . ."

-- 2 Peter 3:4-13

And elsewhere in the New Testament, the usually-prolix John the Divine avers simply, "And I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away." That passage itself comes as kind of a coda to the Book of Revelation, often called the "Apocalypse of St. John," and when you start digging around in the Greek, you discover that "apocalypse" (*apo kalyptein*) in fact doesn't necessarily imply a catastrophe, only a "revelation," or more precisely, an "uncovering." And by golly, when you combine uncovering with [catastrophe](#), you've got something pretty gameable. This week and next, we'll uncover a possible mechanism for apocalypse, a little meta-seismological phenomenon I've dubbed a "reality quake."

"Let us begin, then, with a theory of history and time. Conceive if you will of a great mountain range, an Alps almost beyond the imagination of man, and let it represent the history of our world. . . . [T]he 'mountains' are not as immovable as one might suppose. I hold, in effect, that it is possible that from time to time an earthquake shakes the landscape. It obliterates some things, alters some; rearranges the rock under some of that little fringe of life which inhabits its crevices."

-- Vaughan Davies, in *Carthage Ascendant: The Book of Ash*, #2, by Mary Gentle

The clearest example I know of a reality quake appears in Mary Gentle's amazing 1700-plus-page novel, *The Book of Ash*, which appeared in four volumes in American paperback. A quick precis, then: The frame story of the novel concerns the medievalist Pierce Ratcliff, who is preparing a new translation of the source documents of the life of Ash, a female mercenary captain of the mid-15th century. As he translates the stories (which make up the bulk of the novel), it becomes apparent that Ash's career in the Duchy of Burgundy takes place in an alternate universe, in which Burgundy is the center of European resistance to a Visigothic-Carthaginian jihad directed by silicon intelligences, the Wild Machines. Ratcliff, meanwhile simultaneously discovers that the documents he's been translating have been slipping from "History" shelves in libraries to "Fiction," and artifacts (such as Ash's helmet) have begun vanishing from museums. Meanwhile, he's drawn into the discovery, outside modern Tunis, of archaeological remains of Ash's Carthage -- complete with their golems and steam engines. Apparently, something in Ash's struggle with the Wild Machines caused a reality quake (a "fracture," in Ratcliff's words) that buried her history and upthrust ours, leaving "lost Burgundy" nothing but a golden legend, and Ash a character from medieval romance.

So a reality quake, then, creates such an upheaval in the path of time that history itself is upthrust and overturned, leaving a new past in its wake. Much as an earthquake leaves breaks in the strata and fractures in the geology, or flings up material from deep in the earth onto the surface, a reality quake might leave breaks in civilization or fractures in the historical record, and fling up anomalous shards of other realities (call them "pragmaclasts") into our new/old past. Some zones of the past might be "eimically unstable" (my back-formation from "seismically" and from the Greek *eimi*, "reality"), prone to repeated shifts -- the Near East between, say, 3000 B.C. and 700 B.C., for example. After each shift, only the pragmaclasts remain, and the fossilized traces of previous realities lurk in our subconscious mind, our myths, and certain seemingly-archetypal yet puzzling myths. In a sense, any time-traveler who changes the past causes a reality quake, but (in the commonly understood versions of temporal physics), time "pastward" of his change remains unaffected. A true reality quake, on the other hand, changes the past as well; it might, in fact, *only* change the past, leaving history after the epicenter (eimicenter?) unaltered, but historians unaware that their past is now different.

"Examining the record of past research from the vantage of contemporary historiography, the historian of science may be tempted to exclaim that when paradigms change, the world itself changes with them. Led by a new paradigm, scientists adopt new instruments and look in new places. Even more important, during revolutions scientists see new and different things when looking with familiar instruments in places they have looked before . . . familiar objects are

seen in a different light and are joined by unfamiliar ones as well."

-- Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*

Unless they look for the fractures correctly, and identify the pragmaclasts for what they are -- pieces of the previous reality -- rather than anomalous artifacts or clumsy forgeries. (Are the [Glozel fragments](#) and the [Voynich Manuscript](#) pragmaclasts? Why not?) Careful secret-historians can trace the lineaments of a reality quake's stress fracture by exploring the edges of [hollow history](#) -- in this case, not necessarily truly "hollow," since there *is* a reality underneath it, just one that wasn't there when it was actually happening. Hollow history that's explained by conspiracies or by Velikovskian amnesia doesn't necessarily indicate a reality quake, either, although it could -- leaving aside, for the nonce, issues of perception vs. objectivity. (The Velikovskian author Alfred de Grazia seems to have coined the useful term "quantavolution" to similarly gloss over the notion.) Perhaps Weird Science gadgets like "[Kirlian](#) tachyon eimic lidar" can detect eimic buildup in a sensitive area, or eimic residue from previous reality quakes in rocks, [Shakespeare manuscripts](#), or [crystal skulls](#).

This is the kind of thing that "reality archaeologists" like the heroes of Warren Ellis' *Planetary* or the agents of Warehouse 23 (or the Wheel of Ptah Lodge from *GURPS Cabal*) might discover, and quite a jolly High-Weirdness *GURPS Cliffhangers* or *GURPS Atomic Horror* campaign could center on seeking out "eimic subduction zones" where our current reality grows thin over the solid pragma of the "pre-ality." Any adventure into a [Mandevillian](#) zone of legend and half-history could be explained by a reality-quake; or by the first temblors of a new one, which would make quite the [nova](#) to throw into *GURPS Time Travel* games.

"So when he came opposite Palodes and there was neither wind nor wave, Thamus from the stern, looking towards the land, said the words as he had heard them [from the island], 'The Great God Pan is dead.' Even before the last word had left his lips there arose from the island a great cry of grief not of one person but of many, mingled with exclamations of dismay."

-- Plutarch, "De Defectu Oraculorum"

Not just history needs to change in a reality quake, of course. The laws of nature and physics can alter; perhaps the age of gods and magic existed in reality until some Ragnarok event changed the past, leaving only the myths and the wandering planets as signs of the upheaval. Pious Christian legend took the coincidental (?) timing of Plutarch's anecdote ("in the reign of Tiberius") as evidence that Christ's crucifixion had slain the old gods -- and perhaps, in line with Hermetic "prisca theologica," the resulting reality quake spread out, past and future, from 29 A.D. to plant the Biblical prophecies in their proper past, and to prefigure the story of Christ in that of Balder, Osiris, [Dionysos](#), and Tammuz. (The trouble that archaeologists have matching orthodox dating to the ruins of ancient Israel could be another sign of such a quake.) One good sign of reality quakes may be anomalous heavenly events -- the Bible records that the sun was blotted out during Christ's crucifixion.

"O insupportable! O heavy hour!

Methinks it should be now a huge eclipse

Of sun and moon, and that the affrighted globe

Should yawn at alteration."

-- William Shakespeare, *Othello*, V:ii

And indeed, we find a total solar eclipse visible above the Middle East right there, on November 24, 29 A.D. Said eclipse doesn't actually reach totality above Jerusalem, however, and November wasn't anywhere near Passover. There's a more convenient eclipse in April of 33 A.D., but that's a useless lunar eclipse. These, of course, might be "shockwaves" or "echoes" given off by the eimicenter's truly anomalous darkness -- or the disjunction between report and cosmology might be evidence of calendrical slipping along the eimic fault lines. Our old (eimically-sensitive?) friend Plutarch, as it turns out, observed his own total solar eclipse, most likely south of Athens on March 20, 71 A.D. -- but his record ("De facie lunae") says it occurred "after noon" when in fact it would have happened at 10:50 a.m. More slipping?

This is the kind of thing that disturbs Russian mathematician A.T. Fomenko, who has used ancient and medieval astronomical analysis (especially "correcting" dates assigned to Ptolemy's *Almagest*), combined with statistical

regression theory, to radically re-date and re-cast virtually everything in history before about 1500 A.D. In his "new chronology," what we think is "British" history is actually Byzantine-Russian history, since the British chroniclers re-copied both into their own mythic terms. Out of this stew comes an immense Russian empire, the "Megalion" (which Fomenko claims Western historians corrupted to "Mongol"), ruling Eurasia from Troy (alias Constantinople, alias Rome, alias London, alias Moscow) during a Golden Age under the double eagle. Perhaps the Sack of Troy, the Fourth Crusade, and the Norman Conquest all tell the same story, of a war in the highest reaches of reality between the Cossacks of Megalion and [King Arthur's](#) Knights Templar, a crusade that shook the veritable pillars of heaven. And perhaps Megalion is out there, somewhere, with [Atlantis](#), and [Amazonia](#), and [Bohemia](#), and Burgundy -- waiting for the tremors that signal earthquake weather. Waiting to come back.

Next Week: More variations than you can shake a stick at: potential fractures, possible eimic triggers, malign pragmaclastic entities, and yet more Prealities.

Murphy's Rules



by John Kovalic

Murphy's Rules



Murphy's Rules



Dork Tower!



Dork Tower!



Suspending Disbelief, Expelling Inconsistency

In the past couple of weeks, I've seen *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* on DVD. I've watched *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* in the budget theater (with a print so weathered it prompted my friend to ask, "Yeah, I was kind of wondering if the projectionist was showing the movie with his *butt*"). And I've learned of the upcoming *Batman* Special Edition DVD. (That's the 1966 version, by the by . . . and my personal favorite live-action Batman film.)

Anyway, this triple cinematic whammy helped to personally remind me of one of my media soapboxes . . . one that applies equally well to these three movies (and gaming, natch).

Internal consistency.

Now, a lot of folks tend to rate movies in terms of being believable or unbelievable (or realistic/unrealistic). But I personally don't need a movie to be believable, per se, provided it's *consistently* unbelievable. If a movie (or book, or comic, or whatever) tells me what kind of universe it's taking place in early on -- and it continues to play by those rules throughout -- then I'll pretty much follow it anywhere. But if it violates those rules (or it doesn't adequately explain its rules), then it'll generally blow the shocks on my suspension of disbelief, causing me to lose interest.

Thus the 1966 *Batman* movie establishes a universe where a man can run around dressed in spandex with a bomb (which looks like the old spherical-with-a-fuse-coming-out-top *Rocky & Bullwinkle*-esque explosive), unable to throw it in a river because ducklings are swimming by. (Because, y'know, this Batman is a HERO, and a hero wouldn't kill baby ducks just to get rid of a bomb.)

O Brother, Where Art Thou? crafts a world where railcar-riding prophets are just as likely to wander by as a one-eyed fast-talking John Goodman. And (*SPOILER ALERT*) it's a universe where we believe that a main character *could* have been turned into a toad by river-dwelling women. (*END SPOILER ALERT*)

And *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* takes place in a world where sufficiently trained masters can scale walls, run on water, and even *fly* silently. This is a world, too, where destiny is a tangible force, and years (even decades!) of events can unfold and converge over the course of a couple days.

Now, in comparison there are a jillion movies that aren't internally consistent. (For example, 80% of movies released in the summer.) As a few examples that spring to mind:

(*SPOILERS*)

- In *Blade*, the protagonist manages to kill about 18 billion vampires in the opening sequence without breaking a sweat. Then, later on, he seems to have trouble dealing with three vampires on a subway. (Maybe his secret weakness is subwaynite?)
- In *Batman Returns*, Batman (who, traditionally, has a code against killing . . . which is why he tends to do things the hard way instead of with a rifle from 100 yards) uses his car to set evil clowns on fire. It's a fine line between vigilant and sadistic . . . clown-burning pushes you towards the latter.
- In *Sneakers*, we have everyone terrified of this seemingly impenetrable conspiracy. ("You won't know who to believe, everything you know is wrong, etc., etc., etc.") The truth of the matter is depressingly mundane . . . "My God, soylent green has artificial flavor!" mundane.
- *The Matrix* describes a world where aliens are breeding humans to be batteries (?!), then putting them in a virtual reality world . . . a VR world at perhaps the only point in human history where conspiracy theories and questioning reality are commonplace. (Why not put everyone in a virtual Middle Ages? "Welcome to Obey or Die World! Any questions? Die!")

(END SPOILERS)

Now, in roleplaying this all becomes important because you don't necessarily need your world to be realistic . . . just internally consistent.

If your world is the sort that will allow long-lost brothers, conspiracies, or prophets, that should be made clear fairly early on . . . well before the climactic battle and denouement. (Don't do like *Mummy Returns*, and [SPOILER!] have your protagonist end up being a warrior of God, thanks to his mystic tattoo . [END SPOILER])

If you've permitted your heroes to dodge bullets, have innumerable "flesh wounds," and otherwise be impervious to bullets, don't suddenly kill one of them with a headshot. Don't have explosives be something that kills folks in one scene, then have them be something that propels folks away with a shock cushion of force.

It's okay to have an unbelievable world. It's *good* to have unbelievable worlds, in my opinion . . . the real world can kinda suck, and being able to escape it is a Good Thing. But just make sure your world is internally consistent. Once those cracks start appearing in your world, patching them can be almost impossible.

* * *

As long as I'm on a movie kick this week, I'll point out a game that was born last week in the heckish nightmare that is the [Pyramid chat room](#). You may want to try at home. Good for minutes of amusement!

With the most recent release of the *Indiana Jones Trilogy* on VHS (where the heck are those DVDs?!?), they changed the name of *Raiders of the Lost Ark* to *Indiana Jones and the Raiders of the Lost Ark*. Sure, it has the grace and style of a wounded possum trying to crawl its way across the remainder of the street, but at least it's got that intellectual property name in there, right?

Anyway, try plugging *Indiana Jones and the* onto other movie titles; see what results!

Ideally, in my mind, it should be something that evokes a sense of adventure and wonder, and hopefully sounds suitably pulp-y (even if the movie "IJat..." is appended to doesn't have anything to do with pulp).

Some examples:

- *Indiana Jones and the Seven Samurai*
- *Indiana Jones and the Legend of Bagger Vance*
- *Indiana Jones and the Clockwork Orange*
- *Indiana Jones and the 13th Warrior*
- *Indiana Jones and the Manchurian Candidate*
- *Indiana Jones and the Return of the Jedi*
("Ewoks. I hate these guys. ")
- *Indiana Jones and the Madness of King George*
- *Indiana Jones and the Hunt for Red October*
("Dad?!? Why did you defect? And become a Russian submarine commander?")
- *Indiana Jones and the Man of La Mancha*

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--Steven Marsh

* * *

Last week's answer: *Vampire: The Dark Ages*, p. 71.

(Three stars) "The rebels are in the hills! They have outside support! They have photocopiers!"



by Dmitri Scull

There is a tendency in fantasy roleplaying games to make sweeping generalizations about the non-human cultures that exist in any given world. Elves speak Elvish, worship the Elven gods, live in forests (or occasionally beneath the sea or deep underground), hate orcs, dislike dwarves, and look down upon humanity. Dwarves speak Dwarvish, worship the Dwarven gods, live in big mountain strongholds or worked-out mines, hate orcs, dislike elves, and immerse themselves in metalsmithing. Orcs speak Orcish, worship the Orcish (or Goblinoid) gods, live in the places no one else wants, and hate everyone The list continues.

Humans, on the other hand, seem to be a Renaissance of culture; they often speak many languages (even if there is a common or trade language), they worship many pantheons and many gods, they live just about anywhere, and while most humans hate orcs and "monster-races," they have no real (racial) dislike of non-humans. They're even free to choose which weapons they wish to excel at, unlike the Elves with their bows or the Dwarves with their axes or the Halflings with their slings.

While there are some factors (that is, the gods) that *could* ensure that a single culture exists among an entire race, why are humans the only race without "racial gods?" If the gods maintain the status quo, why don't Humans speak Human, worship the Human gods, live in whatever spot their gods mandated, and hate the people their gods tell them to?

All in all, such single-culture races should tend to be restricted to minor races; usually those occupying remote areas, where they have never heard of other gods, never been exposed to other ways of living, and will only know (at best) a single culture from any other single race.

Developing the non-human races more fully will make them more realistic and more valuable to the campaign. The better developed existing races are, the less need there is for the large numbers of races that proliferate in fantasy campaigns. It will also create a transition from monolithic and predictable races to versatile and capable species. Perhaps, even, common and tired races can be made exotic and believable.

Language

Even when everything else is the same for two different cultures, if they are separated long enough, they will develop different languages. While they may be somewhat understandable to each other (depending on how long they have been separated), they are not likely to be able to converse easily with one another. Even if they maintained contact, local idiom and dialect will easily mark which culture the character is from.

The main exception to this is a religious language. Historically, Latin was the language of choice among diplomats because the Church worked to preserve it from linguistic drift. Even so, the Latin of the Church is not the Latin of the Romans.

The main reason that GMs use "racial languages" is simplicity; realistically, languages should be defined by culture, not merely by racial lines. Especially among tribal cultures, where each tribe is likely to speak its own language. If necessary to maintain the "racial language" concept for campaign reasons, it can easily be broadened by treating the different dialects as specialties, each defaulting to the other at varying levels based on geographical and cultural differences.

Religion

There's no reason why all elves or all dwarves have to worship the same gods. There's especially no reason why tribal races such as orcs should. Even if they do worship the same gods, it is unlikely that they would do so under the same names. Different cultures tend to have different gods -- tolerant cultures may have many different religions; some will also have philosophies that compete with the reverence the gods receive -- sometimes the philosophies dominate and gods are worshipped as an addendum to the philosophy.

Religion is an important facet of most cultures, as it tends to shape the values and ethics of the culture. Sometimes the reverse is true -- that the values and ethics of a culture determine which religions thrive -- but the two are almost inexorably linked. Most fantasy cultures are polytheistic, though few are true polytheists that worship all gods equally. Most devote themselves to one god or goddess in particular, and merely accept the existence of others.

Given the proliferation of polytheistic lists of deities that dominates fantasy roleplaying, simply converting the race to a different religion can change the entire culture and be a refreshing change. Monotheism isn't the best choice (unless they are adamant about it, or a theocracy), as many supposedly polytheistic races are given only one sample deity (usually the leader of the pantheon).

If polytheism is to be retained, consider looking closely at how the deities' powers are divided up. Rather than having gods whose portfolios follow no real theme or that just embody "important concepts," a simple creation myth describing the culture's purpose can add depth to even a simple pantheon. Consider the following: "The World created the People so that it could experience the breadth and depth of emotion. So that the People would not forget their task, the World created the Gods to look over each aspect of emotion." This pantheon could then be either small, with each god or goddess taking on the aspect of whole spheres of emotion. Or it could be huge, with a divinity for every subtle shade of love, hatred, or sorrow. Perhaps the culture is, as a rule, polytheists that hold no one emotion or god above the others, but there exist many cults and heresies that extort the values of living constantly in joy or love (or for a darker tone, hatred or vengeance).

There's no reason why the culture needs to have specific deities anyway. Many tribal cultures are pantheists, animists, or both. Even atheistic cultures are possible, but in a world where the gods can be seen and felt, there would have to exist a reason for the culture to turn away from its spirituality (perhaps the god or goddess of the culture was a tyrant, and the people managed to escape but can't trust in another deity for protection).

Geography

The land a people live in determines much about them. It determines how they get their food, where they get their water, and how they handle the weather. The most successful settlements tend to be near multiple types of terrain, or along rivers. Forest settlements must struggle to find grain staples, or make do with meat and berries (which cannot support large numbers). Underground settlements much quickly resort to mushroom farming or starve -- and it helps if they are fantasy mushroom farms as well, as even the best mushrooms aren't terribly nutritious, and don't work well as a staple in a diet.

Geography helps determine defenses as well, and what sort of threats (monsters, weather, hunger, and thirst) the culture has to contend with. These may bring about changes to the racial template; harsh climates will require or create a tendency to be good at Survival or Scrounging, swamps or ocean habitats will put emphasis on Swimming, and so forth. A particularly mutable race, such as orcs, might even change physically in response to its habitat.

Not all cultures are settled, either. Nomadic cultures, either in the wilderness or in civilized lands, are common in real life, but fairly rare in fantasy games. Wilderness nomads will often be herders, or will follow herds of game animals. They may gather crops as the travel as well -- those that follow set routes of travel will often plant fields to harvest on their return.

Nomads in civilized lands will often be seen as shiftless and not be trusted; usually, they will return this distrust to

outsiders in turn. Such a culture can often come into conflict over territory or property rights with locals, especially if they have widely different customs and laws.

Seafaring nomads lack a real historical counterpart, at least as a culture, but there is no reason that a culture of ship-based wanderers could not exist. Surviving on fishing, trade, and possibly raiding, the nomads would probably have the best ships and know more about the sea than their enemies, and could thus evade retribution for their actions.

Fantasy worlds and magic offer other interesting possibilities, such as aquatic cultures, cultures that live underground, or in active volcanoes. People who live high on glaciers or on solid clouds . . . anywhere an adventurer can go, there could possibly be an existing culture.

Pastimes and Customs

The customs of a culture are determined largely by geography; the geography dictates how much time is had for leisure, what materials are common, and which are rare. A region with little to serve as a surface for permanent writing is often home to illiterate cultures, even if the technology could support a printing press. The availability of metal (and the time allowed for experimenting in metalworking) determines whether the culture could have developed metal tools or steel. Some cultures may have substitutes that will still allow the Tech Level to rise even without metal (Shape Stone could easily create obsidian tools, if it the material is available).

Aside from technology, geography can determine other customs. In desert areas, water is held sacred, so spitting can be either a grave insult or a show of respect. Local plants (especially healing herbs) may be viewed as sacred, and finding them could mean luck. Offering the plant to someone of the opposite sex could even be a proposal of marriage.

War-like or hunting societies are often patriarchal; agrarian cultures are often matriarchal. Tribal societies that rely on participation from everyone are often both or neither. But this need not be the case for all societies, and the strictness of the rule often depends on how severe the local environment is; the more severe the climate, the more likely the rule will be enforced very strictly or not at all.

Of course, this supposes a mammalian race. Races that lay eggs (and thus danger to the female is less likely a direct danger to the child) may not necessarily follow the same rules -- insect races in particular are traditionally matriarchies.

Warlike cultures, ironically, are likely to have more equality in the sexes. This is due to the large number of widows and/or widowers who must protect the children after the warrior dies at a young age and the number of spouses who must hold off sieges while the warrior is fighting elsewhere. Cultures that have community property and communal raising of young would probably be exempt from this, however.

It is a good idea to know which crafts the culture excels at and which they use for trade. A simple change in cultural handicrafts can add depth to an otherwise "standard" race. While dwarves are typically renowned for making weapons and armor, a dwarven culture that makes clocks, timepieces, and other clockwork toys is decidedly different in scope - - they'd likely be less war-like, more patient, and might even gain a few levels of the fantasy game's dexterity.

Laws are another important facet of culture, one which is often simplified and ignored until it becomes a plot device. Especially if the setting is a single country or city, it is important to at least work out a basic code of laws and to have an idea how the judiciary for the area works. This need not be elaborate, just a simple list of what is allowed and what isn't, and what happens when something goes wrong. Tax law, in particular, usually has many silly little loopholes that can be used to relieve characters of excess cash that they might acquire, and if you write up guidelines ahead of time, they can't even accuse you of conspiring to keep them poor . . .

Friends and Enemies

Setting allies and enemies based on culture works a lot better than doing so by race. Even so, the people in the culture

will not usually make such distinctions. After all, if the only elves a culture has met are war-like savages that hunt your people down, they aren't likely to be too keen on meeting any elf, even if the elf is from a different culture.

This can be a good way to throw player characters for a loop. Civilized orcs, sinister dwarves, and elves who have forgotten their link to nature are all possible, and certainly not the same old race. This often means that the culture in question has different Racial Disadvantages from other cultures of that race, but it only makes sense that it would happen now and again.

Such changes in attitude often depend on both neighboring cultures and the basic values of the society. This may require a bit of extra history be written for the culture, but such development is desirable anyway, as it adds depth to the culture.

Multi-Racial Cultures

There's no reason why a culture has to only include a single race. While tribal and primitive cultures will normally only have a single race, more civilized nations (especially imperialist powers and conquerors) may include many races, even many cultures, under one nation. Many human cultures in fantasy realms include other races anyway, but there is no reason to restrict it to humans; there's even no reason to *include* humans . . .

This is the most important time to drop old stereotypes of the non-humans. An individual's cultural identity should come from the culture, not the species, of that individual. Numerous possibilities exist already, without having to do much in the way of inventing new cultures. A sylvan culture, with elves, fauns, dryads, centaurs, and other forest races is easy enough to envision, as is a warrior-nation of orcs, goblins, trolls, and similar races. You could even add in an unexpected race or two (such as a race of sylvan dwarves, or a band of war-like humans that joined the orcs) for variety.

Metropolitan areas are the most likely candidates for a multi-racial culture, but less diverse multi-racial cultures could exist anywhere, especially if one or more races are subjugated by another.

Drastic Changes

Sometimes a culture is a radical departure from what is expected. This can be due to many causes, but one of the most common is disaster. Famine, plague, war, and curses are powerful effects and can take quite the toll on the survivors. Such individuals, with their survivor mentality, may need to consume their dead to survive, may be fiercely territorial, callous, or driven by an intense hatred of that which caused them harm. Such a race may also be desperate to repopulate itself, and prone to rapid violence at the sign of any threat to their children.

Time can also cause divergence, especially if coupled with times of plenty. Decadence can set in, leading to corruption, arrogance, and vice. Such effects usually destroy cultures over time, but they can linger for generations before falling, and cause unbelievable harm to their neighbors. Such people, if faced with hardship, will react according to their now-corrupted goals of maintaining luxury, and may resort to murder, rape, slavery, and consorting with dark powers to survive.

Implementation

Prior to a campaign, this is no problem, but integrating these concepts into an existing campaign could take work. Done early, this is not a problem, especially if the characters have not had time to explore much of the world, but it can be introduced even into a long-standing campaign.

Existing race-languages could be easily revealed to be trade languages used by a specific race; perhaps maintained with help by the gods, while the actual tongues are kept secret. If only one such culture exists in the campaign so far, an adventurer speaking a new dialect of Dwarvish from "over the sea" could dispel the myth of race languages just as

easily.

Adding religions takes more work (or new cultures), but a messiah figure or prophet could appear, bearing news of the "new elvish god" or otherwise challenging the existing pantheon with a new idea. If the old gods don't strike down this prophet, that makes him somewhat more legitimate. Similarly, a secret cult (that existed all along) could suddenly be revealed; this can make a good adventure, especially if it appears to involve important public figures and has a sinister appearance (whether it is in reality sinister or not).

Geographical features can change; rivers do move and deserts do expand, glaciers descend on areas and volcanoes erupt, but most geography-altered cultures would have to be new; exotic locations such as the depths of the sea, deep under the earth, or among the clouds are less likely to have been explored, and more likely to shelter a "hidden" culture.

Implementing differing pastimes and customs between two cultures is easy among less detailed cultures (if the character's aren't there, they won't notice weird customs), harder in the characters' home region(s), although a rarely used custom (such as an almost dead one someone resurrects for a special occasion) could provide a bit of variety.

New friends and enemies is as easy as political maneuvering. Some forewarning can make for good adventuring (as the characters try to stop -- or start -- a war), but sudden, sweeping changes are just as realistic and can be quite dramatic. This can lead into conflicts of loyalty and other role-playing opportunities as well.

An old (single-race) culture can become cosmopolitan due to the annexation of another nation with a different race, a political alliance, or conquest. Mutation or magical experiments can also add a new race (or races) to a culture. Similarly, an influx of refugees from another nation (for whatever reason) can also add diversity.

Drastic changes imply disaster, either an actual world-shattering disaster or a dangerous tyrant assuming leadership. Preventing the debasement and destruction of their own culture is an excellent motive for role-playing, while survival remains the driving adversary in the campaign. Refugees fleeing the disaster can create upheavals and changes in the neighboring cultures as well; entire campaigns can easily be based around this singular event and its repercussions.

A little effort, a little time -- perhaps as little as a few jotted notes -- can turn the old "cookie-cutter" races with their "racial cultures" into as vibrant additions to the campaign as humanity.

As a final note, it takes little extrapolation to apply these guidelines to alien races in science-fiction as well. There's no reason for an alien race to have a universal culture, especially not one that once used STL travel to colonize. Adding a few disparate cultures to the common races multiplies the depth of the race and campaign without having to add whole new alien species. In the end, it is the suspension of disbelief that all fiction, roleplaying included, aims towards, and a little detail can go a long way towards this goal.



by Matt Riggsby

For a thousand years, from its rededication by an emperor to its conquest by the Ottoman Turks, Constantinopolis (Byzantium to the ancient Greeks, Istanbul to the Turks, and Constantinople to us Westerners) was *the* leading city of Europe: capital of empire, center of trade, and bastion of Christianity. It was a metropolis of as many as a million souls, decorated with the grandest churches in Christendom, the most lavish palace on the continent, and the greatest fortifications of any city in the world before or since. Constantinople can serve as the model for an imperial capital in your own fantasy game or, of course, appear in a Medieval historical game. Characters expecting a Classical polis or a high-powered version of a western Medieval town are in for a shock. The Byzantine empire was a unique society, drawing from its Classical heritage and Christian roots similar to those of the west, but it was very different from both.

Geography and Land Use

Constantinople lies on a peninsula at the northern mouth of the Sea of Marmara, where Europe meets Asia Minor. The roughly triangular peninsula has the Sea of Marmara to the south; the Golden Horn, an inlet, to the north, and Europe to the west. This position had enormous strategic value. In the heart of the wealthy, densely populated Greek-speaking world, it controlled land-based trade moving east and west and sea-borne trade moving north and south, and occupied a defensible position with only one face towards the land. At its height, Constantinople was a triangle almost three kilometers east to west and nearly four kilometers from north to south, but was never as densely populated as most other cities of the period.

The land in and around the city is unremarkable farmland. The immediate vicinity is mostly low hills with a few streams and low vegetation but no major rivers and little in the way of forest. Weather in the region is as pleasant as you would expect from the Mediterranean, but like the rest of Greece, earthquakes are frequent. Beyond the city walls, one could expect to find suburbs thinning to scattered houses and villages within sight of one another for a considerable distance, including luxurious villas belonging to the city's notables (including the imperial family).

History

Constantinople

The birth of Constantinople lies in an administrative reform.

In the late third century, the emperor Diocletian took bold steps to reinforce a failing imperial government. The empire was divided into halves, with mirror-image administrations (including "duplicate" emperors) over each half. Imperial power was no longer tied to Rome itself, so Diocletian's Eastern successor Constantine set out to find an appropriately situated place to establish his residence. That place turned out to be the ancient city of Byzantium (the name is Latinized; the Greek is closer to "Byzantion," after a legendary founder, Byzas). Once Constantine had decided on this site for his new home, he instituted a sweeping reconstruction. In 324, Constantine's renovations brought people and decoration from every corner of the empire. A new wall was built enclosing an area far larger than the older town, old monuments were completed or expanded, enormous public baths were built, and new streets and fora were laid out. Because of Constantine's lenient attitude towards Christianity, new Christian churches were built as well. In many ways, Constantinople was intended to be a second Rome even before the "second Rome" ideology became official Byzantine policy. Like Rome, Constantinople was built on seven hills (low hills, but hills nevertheless). The city had its own Senate, hand-picked by Constantine and allowing him even greater autocratic control than previous emperors. Constantine also arranged for the public distribution of grain imported from Egypt for 80,000 people, duplicating Rome's grain dole. The rebuilt city was officially dedicated on May 11, 330.

As the western empire slowly collapsed, the capital of the eastern half grew larger more important. Constantine's successors added a hundred-kilometer aqueduct leading to Thrace and the city's branching main street, the Mese. The most significant addition to the city during this period is the massive wall, built in a mere two years from 413 to 415 by Theodosius II. The walls nearly doubled the city's area, and by the middle of the century, lesser fortifications protected the city's previously unprotected seaward sides. The capital of the largest, richest country in the world (with the possible exception of China), Constantinople grew steadily during this period, reaching a population of perhaps as much as one million by the end of the fifth century. When the imperial throne in Rome became defunct in 476, it did

not cause undue excitement in Constantinople, since most of Italy remained under at least nominal Roman/Byzantine authority under Gothic subject kings, but it left Constantinople the most important city in the only European empire worthy of the name. Anastasius I's financial reforms at the end of the fifth century left the crown well-supplied with gold, paving the way for the reign of Justinian.

Justinian set the tone for later emperors and, in some ways, for law and government in Europe for centuries to come. He initiated massive legal reforms and established the heavily ceremonial tone of the Byzantine court. He also waged long, grueling wars in the east and Italy, and was responsible for much of the physical look of the city. On January 11, 532, politically motivated fans at the Hippodrome started an uprising, the Nika revolt, to protest imperial policies. Increasingly brutal attempts to suppress the revolt eventually succeeded, killing many rioters and leaving most of the city in ashes and rubble. While most smaller buildings were rebuilt privately, Justinian rebuilt the palace and major churches as well as a large reservoir. Public baths, a fixture of Classical city life, began to go out of fashion during this period, since more puritanical Christians viewed public nudity as shameful and the baths themselves as hotbeds of immorality.

The reign of Justinian marks the high point of Constantinople's history in terms of wealth, population, power, and artistic activity. Soon thereafter, the city began to decline. A series of plagues struck the empire through the sixth century. The largest struck in 542, and is said to have reduced the population of the city by half. Later in the sixth century, the empire became involved in an expensive and inconclusive series of wars with Persia lasting into the seventh century. Constantinople itself came under attack in 626 (the city is embarrassingly easy to reach by sea, so it was frequently besieged). The Theodosian wall withstood the attack marvelously, but the aqueduct was rendered inoperative. But this was only the beginning of the Byzantines' problems. Not long after a settlement with the Persians, the vigorous new religion of Islam burst out of Arabia, and the valuable Byzantine possessions in Syria and North Africa quickly fell to the Muslims, as did the tottering Persian empire. This was a powerful economic blow to the Byzantine empire, since Syria and Egypt were its primary grain-growing regions. Constantinople was besieged by Muslims in 674 and again in 717. Again, the walls withstood the siege, but there was little money to spend on maintenance, so many old constructions, like the Roman sewer system, began to fall out of use.

Even as a Byzantine-Muslim frontier stabilized near the modern southern Turkish border, one of the most serious theological battles in the history of Orthodoxy was starting. The emperor Leo III issued an order for the destruction of icons in 730, inaugurating iconoclasm. For the next century and a half, Byzantine society could be divided into two camps: iconoclasts, who supported the destruction of icons and images in general on the grounds that they were graven images prohibited by the Commandments; and iconophiles, who supported the use of icons as a focus for worship, justified by their place in the Orthodox tradition. Eventually, the iconophiles won as the conflict petered out, but little of artistic interest survives from this period, and many older artworks were defaced or destroyed outright. The empire was also beset by other economic and military problems, such as Slavic expansion into the Balkans and annual Muslim raids into Anatolia. Constantine V restored the aqueduct in 756, and other emperors reinforced the sea walls, but war, plague, and economic problems had taken their toll on the population. By the mid-ninth century, Constantinople probably held around 100,000 people, occupying a fraction of the city's area.

By the 10th century, the empire's domestic and foreign problems abated, leading to a revival of the empire. The Byzantines regained ground lost to the Slavs and new money began to flow into the city. One of the uses of that money was to build an auxiliary palace at Magnaura adorned with amazing automata, artificial animals which twittered and roared through ingenious use of hydraulics. The old palace fell into disuse, and the imperial family eventually moved to a new palace at Blachernae shortly before the Crusades. Originally outside the city wall, Manuel I Comnenus brought the palace inside by rebuilding the wall's northern section.

Despite the revival, the empire was never as large or as wealthy as it had been under Justinian, and after disastrous military defeats in 1057 by Normans in Italy and Turks in eastern Anatolia the empire began to shrink again. The decline was temporarily halted by the Crusades. In the 1090's, the emperor Alexius issued a call to the west for mercenaries to fight the heathen Turks and recover lost territory for the Christian (albeit Orthodox) Byzantine empire. His request was transformed in the west into a church-sanctioned mass movement to conquer the Holy Land. Without meaning to, Constantinople became a jumping-off point for armies heading to newly conquered Crusader kingdoms. Dazzled by the glories of Constantinople, travelers returned to the west with ideas and books preserved by the eastern

empire, and while the empire regained only a little ground as the result of the Crusaders' efforts, the westerners at least brought the Muslim expansion to a temporary halt.

For the empire, the Crusading period was brought to a tragic end by the Fourth Crusade. A Frankish Crusader army was drawn into a dispute over the imperial throne. The war ended with the Crusaders seizing Constantinople for themselves in 1204, doing untold damage and taking most of the city's carefully hoarded store of riches with them back to Western Europe. The Latin emperors, as the western rulers of Constantinople were called, were able to take control of parts of the empire, but the Greeks retained autonomy in small territories around Greece and Anatolia. The Latins reorganized their territory along feudal lines, completely dismantling the Byzantine administration, but ultimately their presence in Greece collapsed. In 1261, a Greek reconnaissance-in-force discovered that a largely deserted Constantinople had been left undefended, and they were able to recover it without a battle.

The decimated, Westernized remnants of the empire creaked along for two more centuries. By this time, it encompassed only parts of the Peloponnesus and Thrace and was hardly even a regional power, much less a major player on the world stage. Despite a flowering in Byzantine art and literature during this period, mostly depicting a sweet sadness, there was not enough money or manpower to do much new construction or even repair, so the city continued to crumble. Already a shadow of its former self, Constantinople continued to shrink as the Middle Ages waned. Fourteenth century travelers described a series of hamlets scattered around the ruins of a vast city.

The inevitable end came in 1453. The Turkish sultan Mehmet II demanded the complete military and political capitulation of Constantinople. The last emperors had been paying tribute to the Turks, but Constantine XI Palaeologus refused to surrender the sovereignty of the Romans. The Turks set siege to the city in one of the first major European uses of cannon. The walls were inadequately guarded, but the millennium-old Theodosian defenses withstood heavy bombardment for two months. At dawn of May 29th, a massive assault finally penetrated the walls. Reports are contradictory on small details, but the last emperor was not captured, and it seems likely that he died fighting.

The Turkish conquest had an effect on the city much like that of the Fourth Crusade, and after Mehmet took Constantinople as the capital of the Ottoman Empire, an increasing Turkish presence began to erase the older Byzantine city. The Theodosian walls and the Hippodrome were never rebuilt and the sultan's Grand Seraglio replaced the remnants of the Byzantine Grand Palace, but the Hagia Sophia has survived as a mosque.

Religion

Constantinople was a center of Orthodox Christianity, a conservative but more "ruggedly independent" religion which differs significantly from Catholicism in doctrine and organization. Those differences were expressed quite vehemently despite constant negotiation to reconcile eastern and western churches; at one famously disastrous conference, Catholic and Orthodox bishops ended up excommunicating each other. Whereas the West was dominated by the papacy, Orthodox clergy were less controlled by their leading figure, the bishop of Constantinople, usually called the patriarch. The church was still a political presence, but not an overbearing power as it was in the west. At any rate, the Byzantines were people who took their religion seriously and could get very exercised over doctrinal points which might appear incomprehensible to outsiders. For example, publically insisting that the human and divine natures of Christ were conjoined or comingled rather than united was criminal heresy. Open worship of pagan gods or preaching heretical beliefs could result in imprisonment or violence. Nevertheless, other Christians might bring their own priests with them so long as they don't try to convert anybody, there is a small Jewish community, and the city had at least one mosque as early as the tenth century.

The Byzantines had a strong monastic tradition, but Byzantine monasteries were less wealthy and powerful than their western counterparts. Each monastery was an independent institution, not a member of a larger order. Constantinople was home to a number of monasteries of all sizes, which could serve as temporary retreats for contemplation, lodging for travelers, and even prisons.

Arts, Sciences, and Education

The empire in general and Constantinople in particular had a much higher literacy rate than the rest of Europe. Children were usually taught to read by their parents and went on to secondary education offered by the state or the church. Constantinople also had a state-sponsored university specializing in law. As one might expect from a literate society, there are a lot of books. Individual books were extremely expensive, but small private libraries were not uncommon in the city, and the emperor, churches, and monasteries had their own collections. Ecclesiastical libraries had mostly religiously oriented texts, although some had small, restricted collections of secular books. Non-religious works would mostly be found in private and imperial libraries.

Those books included the most important works of Western literature to date, and then some. While the Byzantines didn't go in for innovation, they did have a stockpile of ancient literature, supplemented by encyclopedic collections of excerpts, huge volumes of religious commentary (biographies of saints were enormously popular), and a growing body of contemporary fiction. If a Classical work exists, it can be found in Constantinople, and probably in a choice of Latin or Greek. The hard part would be finding somebody who has the book in question and getting permission to read it. The Byzantines had an ambivalent attitude towards Classical science and literature because of its explicitly pagan content (although in a fantasy game, Classical "science" and Orthodox mysticism might combine in a hidden magical tradition with a complexity to rival the Qaballah).

Byzantine technology was as high as any in Europe and western Asia, although its uses may be questionable. For example, the Byzantines possessed complex hydraulic technology and primitive steam power, but it was used only for a handful of spectacular amusements like an artificial tree full of singing mechanical birds at the imperial palace. One area in which the stockpile of knowledge was more generally used was medicine. Byzantine doctors had extensive manuals on surgery and herbal medicine, and Byzantine medicine was as least as advanced as Muslim medicine for most periods.

Byzantine visual arts are full of religious motifs, and except during Iconoclasm, just about every home and shop had at least one icon somewhere, a portable painting or relief of a favorite religious figure used as a focus for worship. Byzantine painting is stylized, lacking perspective and background details and relying heavily on frontal views and a language of specific gestures and stances. Mosaic survived as a major art form, and the Byzantines excelled at producing blue and purple stained glass. Sadly, many performing arts were dead or dying for most of Byzantine history. Plays were performed at the Hippodrome, but were eventually banned in the seventh century. Aristocrats and the imperial entourage occasionally sponsored private performances, but most Byzantines would never see a play. Church music was almost entirely vocal music, although instruments were used in secular music.

Military, Police, and Public Services

The composition of the Byzantine army varied considerably from time to time. It usually had good heavy cavalry, acceptable infantry, and a sizable navy for as long as it was a significant power, and they had incendiary Greek fire. However, the Byzantines tried to avoid warfare and relied on their formidable diplomacy to persuade others to fight their wars for them, usually with considerable success. At any rate, military units are not likely to be found in the city itself. Nevertheless, an armed presence in the city was provided by the palace guard and a corps of night watchmen. Constantinople was one of the few Medieval cities to actually have prisons, albeit small ones.

Constantinople enjoyed other services found in modern cities. The government maintained fire brigades and several hospitals. Originally, hospitals were a cross between medical facilities and shelters for travelers and the poor, but in time they came to be simply places for care of the sick. Because Constantinople was a hub of trade and government, it was well prepared for visitors relative to most Medieval cities. If a traveler didn't have friends to stay with, he might find accommodation in private inns, monasteries, or free hostels supported by the government.

Clothing

The basic Byzantine garment is a long, loose tunic, typically worn belted and with a trouser-like undergarment, often accompanied by a cloak or robe, and sometimes supplemented with multiple layers of tunics. There are remarkably few basic garments, but there is a dizzying array of subtleties of color, material, number of layers, and so forth.

Particular colors or types of decoration (particularly gems) may indicate a specific office or position in society, and an outsider may never get the hang of it all. A foreigner may take it as a rule of thumb that the higher someone's position, the more layers and colors he will wear and the better material his clothes will be made from (for example, silk rather than wool and linen). Red and purple are imperial colors and should be avoided. Men are typically bare-headed, but women (particularly married women) may wear a turban-like head cloth. Footwear consists of low boots or high sandals for commoners (mostly white), slippers for clergy and officials (black or colored).

Food

The Byzantine diet was similar to diets elsewhere in Europe: lots of grain, supplemented by legumes, vegetables, meat, and cheese. However, the role of bread was somewhat less pronounced than in other societies. The Byzantines appear to have eaten more meat and cheese than other peoples, mostly mutton and sheep's-milk cheese, and a great deal of olive oil. The poor tended to replace meat with eggs.

Streets and Homes

Despite the city's Roman origin, the main streets of Constantinople did not conform to a square street grid. This is a little strange, since the city was heavily rebuilt in a single building episode and the low topography of the city presents no obstacles to a squared grid. The main street, the Mese, was paved and perhaps colonnaded for its entire length and lined with shops. Lesser streets were twisted and of varying width, and not necessarily paved.

Byzantine homes are less open than other Mediterranean homes, with small (and sometimes no) courtyards and few windows, with a greater reliance on lamps and candles for light. Roofs were typically flat or slightly peaked, covered with thatch or earthen tiles. In multi-storied homes, the ground was often used for shops and storage, with living quarters above. In its more populous stages, Constantinople also had blocks of apartment buildings. The eastern neighborhoods, closer to the palace and the Hagia Sophia, appear to have been somewhat wealthier than those to the west. Foreigners were assigned to small quarters around the city proper, or across the Golden Horn in the suburb of Galata.

What To See

Regardless of the visitor's feelings about Orthodoxy, the Byzantines themselves, or anything else connected to the eastern empire, the physical city never failed to impress. These are just the most notable of the city's landmarks.

The Wall

Unlike many Western cities, Constantinople did not have a citadel or other internal "last line of defense." Even the ancient acropolis had passed into disuse. However, the city did not need one. In addition to its eminently defensible geographic position, Constantinople was protected by the most massive defensive walls of any city in the world.

The wall was built in a slightly curving four kilometer line running north-south. It is made of alternating courses of brick and stone, giving it a banded appearance (a common look in Byzantine architecture). It's actually a series of defenses rather than a single wall: a ditch seven meters deep and eighteen across, then a two meter tall terrace, then an eight meter tall curtain wall (with towers a mere half-meter taller), another terrace about fourteen meters across, and a second wall twelve meters tall (towers about 20 meters tall). By 450, there were ninety-two towers along the inner wall. Most of the towers are pentagonal, presenting a pointed face to the enemy, but some are square or octagonal. Rather than arrow slits, the towers were furnished with larger embrasures sheltering small ballistae.

The wall was pierced by several sets of gates. Unlike most Byzantine fortifications, the gates appear to have been built on a straight axis. Each gate was flanked by a pair of towers on both the inner and outer walls. The gates varied in decoration from the grand Golden Gate to utterly utilitarian posterns, but all were equipped with wooden drawbridges.

Hagia Sophia

Constantinople has hundreds of churches and shrines, several of which would be impressive in any city, but their undisputed queen is the Hagia Sophia, the church of sacred wisdom. The Hagia Sophia, started in 532 and completed in 537, was by far the largest, grandest church ever attempted, and remained so until the construction of the largest Gothic cathedrals, the scope of which it inspired. The exterior is almost square (78 by 72 meters, if one ignores the entryway). The interior follows a three-aisled floor plan, with the center section about twice as wide and tall as the side aisles. The side aisles reach a height of about 17 meters and have a story of galleries over them, which communicate with the lower floor by stairways near the entrance on the west end. The center aisle is topped by a huge dome nearly fifteen meters deep, bringing the ceiling at its highest point to a height of about 56 meters. The dome rests on four large pillars at the points of a square and is pierced at its base by a series of small windows between the ribs of the dome, making it appear as though it is hanging from the sky rather than sitting on the pillars. The grand central dome is flanked by smaller hemispherical domes over the side aisles, and the semi-domes and the walls are set with a number of small windows. The building as a whole is extensively decorated with abstract patterns and mosaics of church fathers, saints, emperors, and biblical characters.

The Palace

The palace was never a single building, but rather a series of buildings, gardens, terraces, and walkways in a sort of walled palace district. Even this picture is deceptive, since the Byzantine emperors had at least three palaces scattered around the city. The original palace lay on a gently sloping piece of land in the eastern end of the city, immediately to the east of the Hippodrome and south of the Hagia Sophia and the Mese. The entrance to the complex was a vestibule building known as the Chalke, which opened off the Mese. The palace had a "public" section towards the northeastern end with a large courthouse called Tribunal or Delphax surrounded by meeting and dining rooms and a gold-domed throne room (the Chrystriklinos), and a "private" section called Daphne. The palace had its own artificial harbor, and considerable area was given over to barracks for the palace guards. This palace was abandoned by Alexius I, and was almost completely destroyed by the time of the Turkish invasion.

The Hippodrome

The Hippodrome was Constantinople's center for public events of all kinds, including plays (before they were banned), athletic events, public appearances by the emperor, and even court cases, but particularly chariot races. The Hippodrome was an elongated U shape, perhaps 450 meters long and 117.5 meters across the seats or 79.5 meters across the course. Seating has been estimated at 100,000. The open end, which held the entrance gates, pointed to the northeast. The center of the race course was occupied by a long spina, which was decorated with statues and obelisks, including a pharonic obelisk and a column dedicated to the oracle of Delphi around 390 BC. The seating section rose on tiers of vaults and was surmounted by a covered colonnaded passage. The open end had twelve gates, all of which could be opened simultaneously at the start of the race. The gates were topped by gilded statues of four horses, looted in the Fourth Crusade and taken to Venice's San Marco. The Hippodrome also had a private box (actually a two-story structure with seating above and a reception area below) for the emperor, the Kathisma, which had a passage connected directly to the palace. Horse races became less popular after the ninth century, and the Hippodrome was largely abandoned and in ruins by the time of the Turkish invasion.

What To Do

Foreigners might not find Constantinople as much fun as the large cities of the west. The Byzantine standard of behavior is to be quiet and still as much as possible, and people are encouraged to be more introspective than in the more freewheeling, democratic west. Certainly, the common people of Constantinople were uninhibited enough to make good-natured dirty jokes about Justinian's wife and and moon the Crusaders *en masse* during the Fourth Crusade, and there are still taverns, prostitutes, and gambling, but outsiders will still find them more reserved on average than people elsewhere. Contemplative games related to modern chess and checkers were popular amusements, although more boisterous dice games could also be found.

But what Constantinople lacks in exciting natives, it makes up for in exciting foreigners. It is, after all, capital of a multicultural empire, a site for major religious conferences, and a center of international trade. Adventurers will be able to find Egyptians, Syrians, Italians, Russians, Franks, Vikings, Slavs, and just about anybody else from Europe, North Africa, and western Asia. Italians, particularly from Pisa, Genoa, and [Venice](#), Russians, and Scandinavians (the Volga was a virtual highway from Scandinavia to the Black Sea) always traded in Constantinople, and Scandinavians served in the Byzantine military at least as early as the ninth century (most famously in the Varangian Guard, an axe-wielding imperial bodyguard) but western Europeans will be particularly common once the Crusades begin.

And even if the people aren't that much fun, Constantinople is the site of almost constant ceremonies and processions, so there will always be something to watch. Saints' days are accompanied by neighborhood or imperial feasts (sometimes accompanied by public distribution of food and wine), and the comings and goings of the imperial family, allies, clergy, and ambassadors are likely to be accompanied by processions. And, of course, there's the Hippodrome. Constantinople's race track is home to factions of hard-core fans, identified by colors: the Reds, Greens, Blues, and Whites. The factions were responsible for some riots (just as modern sports fans sometimes are), but could also be called on for help after disasters.

Constantinople In The Campaign

"Byzantine" has come to be synonymous with infinitely complex politics and intrigue, which is perhaps unfair. The imperial court was encrusted with layers of ceremony and niceties of behavior and language, but was probably no more conniving than any other large government. Nevertheless, players will probably expect convoluted intrigue, so you'd best give it to them. The details of courtly practices would take their own book (say, *The Book Of Ceremonies*, composed under the emperor Constantine Porphyrogenetos). Suffice it to say that the court is full of hidden factions, officials whose functions are obscure or have no relationship to their titles, and behavior verging on emperor-worship. Characters geared towards fighting won't find much to do in Constantinople unless the city is under attack or during the occasional riot, but they can certainly find employment in the Byzantine military. Merchants, on the other hand, will find that Constantinople is one of the best markets they can find. Even if you don't intend to run adventures in Constantinople itself, it makes a great base of operations and place to assemble a party of adventurers. Here are some other adventure ideas:

- **Hail Mary:** The PCs, knights of Charlemagne, discover that a particular sacred icon is a potent magical item. They have a complete physical description, but all they know about its whereabouts is that it hangs in a church in Constantinople. This presents them with three large tasks. First, finding a specific icon in Constantinople is very much a needle-in-a-haystack proposition, save that the stack is composed entirely of very similar needles. Second, they must ease a large, heavy, delicate wooden object out of a church where its rightful owner is unlikely to let it go. Third, the year is around 800 AD and Iconoclasm is full swing. They must find the icon and get it to safety before somebody destroys it.
- **Constantinople Underground:** Before the London Underground and the Paris catacombs, there were the sewers and waterworks of the cities of the Roman empire, with tunnels which could be tall enough for a man to walk erect in. And who knows what lurks in those tunnels, unused but perhaps not collapsed after the eighth century? A demon held back by the power of Christ and the saints? A forgotten monster of the Classical age, trapped under Byzantium since its ancient founding? Whatever it is, the PCs will probably have to stop it. Alternatively, perhaps the PCs can't stop it, but they *can* find a lost saint, sleeping in a tomb also lost somewhere under the city. Any adventure set under Constantinople should pass through one of the city's reservoirs. While some of them are simply deep, open pools, others are roofed, their covers held up by forests of pillars. If the water is deep enough for boating (which, for the purposes of adventure, it should be), the PCs will find themselves poling through a vast, dark, echoey underground lake, picking their way through an eerie landscape of decayed stone pillars.

Important Vocabulary

During the years in question, nobody uses the word "Byzantine." It was coined by 16th century scholars to distinguish

between the ancient and Medieval phases of the eastern Roman empire. The Byzantines call themselves Romans. Westerners call them Greeks. Their other neighbors (Turks, Slavs, etc.) always knew them as Romans and, being largely unconcerned with Rome itself, continue call them that. The city itself is usually called Constantinople, although some may occasionally say Byzantium and the Turks may call it Stambul. If the GM needs to come up with the name of a street, church, or monastery, pick a Greek name and attach the epithet *hagia* or *hagios* (meaning "blessed"). *Hagia/os* is the title used for saints; for example, in Greece, Saint Steven would be *Hagios Stephanos*.

Further Reading

Constantinople is just part of a large empire with a long, complex history, so if you're going to use it in a historical campaign or deal specifically with the imperial court, it may be a good idea to get a better picture of Byzantine history as a whole. These works may help.

- Kazhdan, Alexander P., et al. (eds.), *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*. A dense, technical, three-volume encyclopedia, and an excellent brief reference for anything touching on the Byzantine world. Check your local university library.
- Norwich, John Julius, *Byzantium: The Early Centuries*, *Byzantium: The Apogee*, and *Byzantium: The Decline And Fall*. Not a scholarly history, but quite accessible to the non-specialist audience.
- Ostrogorsky, George, *History of the Byzantine State*. Becoming dated, but nevertheless the standard textbook for Byzantine history.
- Rice, Tamara Talbot, *Everyday Life in Byzantium*. Very useful.
- <http://www.bway.net/~halsall/byzantium.html>. This site, maintained by a Byzantine scholar at Fordham, is an excellent on-line source of texts, information, and links to other Byzantine sites.



by **Matt Mansell**

Experienced gamers can be one of the most jaded audiences around. Sometimes their boredom is so evident that it makes the GM wonder why they bother. Conversely stereotyped adventures and overly linear plots can often put off new gamers. Today's generation is spoilt for choice when it comes to "listening to stories." Movies, novels, television all strive to find new and innovative ways to capture new viewers and keep the old. Why should roleplaying be any different?

I have three suggestions for ways to spice up your stories and grab your players by the imaginations to have them hungering for more. All of them are relatively easy to incorporate into an existing campaign.

Ontological Shock

The uneasy and unholy alliance stopped in the clearing, the hills loomed around the valley, imposing and silent. Malleus, Magus of House Verditis, subtly pointed his Talisman at the vampires and considered the words and gestures for the Ball of Abysmal Flame spell he had learnt for this occasion. His companions were equally nervous, bodyguards clutching weapons nervously, Magi rehearsing spells in their heads. It was apparent that the vampires had similar concerns. Their gaunt figures edged quietly out of the night, eyes darting. Bernard of House Tremere stepped forward; the beast that named itself Maximus mirrored the movement. Both of them gave of a sense of obstinate arrogance and assurance.

"As agreed, we have met in this place to join forces against the tide of darkness that threatens out land." Bernard's voice was confident and neutral.

Maximus grinned a toothy grin. "Yes, that is correct." His Latin was archaic, but understandable. "We have come to remove that threat."

"Then we agree to a peaceful alliance until this task is finished?"

"Yes, we agree." They shook hands, neither displaying the disgust or hatred they both felt.

Then the air shimmered and a booming voice emerged from the thin air between them. "Do not move or you will be destroyed!"

Oswulf, Malleus's bodyguard broke, he had barely taken a step when there was a flash of lightning and he collapsed unconscious. Malleus stood very still, and muttered the Latin of a spell under his breath.

Around them the air stopped shimmering and revealed fifteen knights in armor like he had never seen before. Each held what he could only think of as a crossbow-like device made

from shining metal.

One of the knights stepped forward. "I am Captain Janus of the United Systems Deeps Scout Service. We mean you no harm; we wish to join your alliance to destroy the K'kartarven that has invaded your world."

This is a slightly dramatized account of an actual scene in a game I ran with a friend. I ran a *Vampire: the Dark Ages* campaign, he ran an *Ars Magica* campaign. As they progressed we collaborated on the overarching plot and slowly revealed it to them. A powerful demon was destroying villages with its demonic familiars and raising an army to take over the world. Slowly the two groups of characters became aware of each other, slowly they sounded each other out and realized that the other side knew things they did not know. Eventually, after much tense negotiation, they decided to join forces against this threat.

That's when the Space Marines turned up. It turned out that an alien species had crashed a colony ship in the Black Hills and it was now trying to expand its influence. The Space Marines had chased it, shot it down and had now come down to clean up. They also wanted to join forces.

They never guessed. The players had absolutely no idea what was going to happen.

One of the most powerful tools you have to capture the attention of your players is their own preconceptions. If you tell them you are playing *Vampire the Dark Ages*, or *Ars Magica*, they expect certain things to happen, or be capable of happening. It's a historic setting, so technology will be primitive and they certainly don't expect starships to appear in the air above them.

In fact in the example above we shocked them twice. At first they did not know about the other group. Then they realized they were playing a *Vampire/Ars Magica* crossover and they built new expectations. Then we completely undermined them by revealing the truth as to what had been happening the whole time.

The important thing here is planning. If you suddenly spring something like this on your players, you make destroy their ability to suspend disbelief. You will face cries of "You just made this up to mess with us!" . . . which might be true, but if you have it planned you will have something to fall back on. In the *Vampire/Ars Magica* crossover we had a list of rumors that we delivered at the start of each session. Some were plainly true, some were distorted truth and many were false. We worked out the rumors between us, based on what each of the important groups were doing (the aliens and space marines were run by us as NPC groups). Then we would give these rumors to the characters to follow up.

There were rumors like, "A huge silver Dragon appeared over London for a few moments before disappearing; the Archbishop of York is claiming that it's an omen from God about the corruption of the city." Obviously, it was a spaceship that appeared over London. Or, "Strange knights were seen to appear out of thin air and strike down a dozen bandits attacking a small homestead. They fired lightning from their hands. The Bishop of Exeter claims they were angels helping the righteous. They disappeared again after the bandits were all knocked unconscious for the Baron's men." Two space marines decloaked and took out some bandits. The marines were later reprimanded by their superiors for breaching the no contact code.

And so on. When the players looked back the rumors they saw the whole story unfold before their eyes.

The idea here is to allow the players to assume they are playing in a certain type of game. Play up the traditional elements of that genre while carefully laying obscure clues about the actual game hidden underneath. In fact, the clues do not have to be all that subtle; most players will simply assume that they are relevant to the current game and interpret them as such. This is the power of the preconceptions of Genre.

An idea I am toying with currently is to take a group of experienced *Unknown Armies* players and ostensibly start a game based on that universe. There will be not Adepts or Avatars, but the characters will all know the truth about the Occult Underground. Or at least they think they do. In reality the characters are the pawns in the cosmic struggle between Heaven and Hell, and the game is actually *In Nomine*. One of the main features of the metaphysics of

Unknown Armies is the denial of any truth in the major organized monotheistic religions. The religions exist, and many occult people partake of them and possibly believe them to be true, but the "objective" reality of the game is not a Judeo-Christian one. Angels and Demons, in the *In Nomine* sense, do not exist.

Thus the preconceptions of the players that the game world is a relativistic place with little objective reality, little objective truth, no Heaven and Hell, will be entirely unfounded. Ontological shock. The make up of the universe is not as we thought it was.

Obviously Ontological Shock requires a lot of careful planning to effectively pull off without ruining the believability of a story. In general it is probably better to build a campaign with it in mind rather than implement it into an existing campaign, though this can also work.

If you are looking for a way to revitalize player interest in an existing game, or introduce a new story arch in an interesting way then the following techniques might be better suited to your purposes.

The Old Bait and Switch

This is similar to Ontological Shock, but much smaller in scope. The idea here is to take a well-established element of the current game and suddenly show the characters that their preconceptions about that element are completely wrong.

Perhaps an example is in order. I am currently running an *Ars Magica* campaign. Early in this campaign there was a knight associated with the magi; this knight was very ambitious, and he had a swarthy squire. The magi, breaking the oath they had sworn to, magically aided this knight to steal the Duke of Exeter's taxes, and then assault the Isle of Lundy (a practically impregnable stronghold) in the Bristol Channel. The sudden increase of wealth and the taking of the Isle of Lundy (and execution of the "rebellious" Lord DeMarisco who previously owned the island) put the knight in a place to appeal to the current King of England for the palatinate (franchise) of Cornwall. So in a relatively short period of time this knight has become an influential noble and he could not have done it without the magi's help. Or could he? To further incriminate themselves, the magi have been magically altering the Count Palatine of Corwall's ideals to better suit their own.

To make it clear for the non-*Ars Magica* players out there, magi of the Order of Hermes swear an oath not to interfere in the affairs of the mundane population (i.e. the Count). To do otherwise risks bringing the wrath of the rest of the mundane population of Europe (i.e. the Church, other Nobles, The King) upon the Order itself. So that magi have committed a series of crimes against their Order to get this man to be the influential noble that he now is.

Now, I plan to have them visit the Count to petition him for more money (he pays their way). When they go they will take a new bodyguard along with them. This bodyguard has "The Sight." In other words, he can see ghosts, spirits, and demons, even if they are disguised as something else (Hermetic magic cannot detect demons). He will accompany them into the presence of the Count and get very upset. When questioned he will claim, discretely, that the Count's squire is actually a demon in disguise.

Suddenly everything they knew about the count is thrown into doubt. Does the Count know that his squire is a demon? If he does is he a Diabolist? If he doesn't how can they protect/warn him?

Now I will admit that I had not planned this story from the beginning of the campaign. I was sitting down reviewing the game, looking at the Count wondering how to tie up this loose end. Basically I wanted to phase the Count out of the story and needed a way to do so that would be interesting and promote other stories.

Trouble Comes in Threes

All too often adventures can have a linear feel to them. They have a definite start middle and ending. There is nothing wrong with this, but every now and then a player will crave something more.

Life is rarely linear or simple. So why run your games that way? The idea here is to layer the problems the character must face over the top of each other. Force them to prioritize. Start out with one story event. Smiling Joe and his team of Hell Hounds have a meeting at 8pm with a big client. At 7:30 Smiling Joe finds out that his kid sister is missing. She never came home after school. Now Mr. Big has demanded to see Smiling Joe and the whole team in person. But Joe's mum is frantic, surely he can help find his sister?

And then you throw in the emergency call from a contact. "Yo Joe? I gots this letter for ya. It's real important like. Ya gots ta come and get it man, right now y'here. I can't hang in my apartment too long cause I am on the run from these badass dudes in black coats."

Suddenly poor Joe and his team have to be in three places at once. And Smiling Joe definitely isn't smiling anymore.

There are two important variations to this technique. Internal Consistency and Unrelated Chaos. The overwhelming stereotype in modern storytelling seems to be the Internal Consistency model. If the audience doesn't understand how all these disparate events are related now, they will by the end of the story. Movies, TV serials, Books, comics, they all do it. So you can too. In the example above the contact has stolen a valuable piece of information of a dead FBI agent. It shows the location of the Vampire hideout that Joe and his team has been tracking. The Black Coats are the FBI agents trying to get the file back. Joe's sister has been kidnapped by the vampires because Joe is getting to close and they need a deterrent. The meeting with Mr Big is an arms deal so that Joe and his team can get the guns they need to take out the Vampire nest.

This is the default setting. Most players will assume that everything ties in together, they just don't know how. It doesn't have to be this way.

Running three separate, unrelated, stories at once can be draining, but immensely rewarding. In the example above Mr Big has an important contract that will earn the group money and prestige. The kid sister has run away with her boyfriend and is in serious danger of becoming Vampire food and the letter the contact has is actually a clue to the location of Smiling Joe's arch nemesis the demon Chabrezal.

Smiling Joe and his team will have to prioritize. In a situation like this it's important that you play out the consequences of choices not taken. Assuming Joe and his team go after his sister Mr Big gets angry and spreads the word amongst other "business" people that Smiling Joe's team is unreliable. If they contact him later it's too late, the job is gone. And once they have rescued the sister they chase off after Chabrezal to find that he has already left, quite possibly after causing serious trouble for Joe and his team.

This is the Shafted Three Ways from Sunday scenario. Like life, there is no single right action. The characters and their players will have to carefully consider what their priorities are and act according to them and suffer the consequences.

There is a danger that they will split up. The way to deal with this is to present the problems as things the whole group is needed to deal with. So Mr. Big really meant it when he said he wanted the whole team. And the Vampire nest Joe's sister has been dragged into is well-fortified and looks to have four or five of the beasts, more than the two sent to investigate can handle alone. As for Chabrezal, we he would love to have one or two characters drop by for a chat . . .

If they *do* split up, make the other players watch and grimace as the characters in the spotlight struggle to contain the situation.

On a closing note, all of these techniques are best used sparingly. Run your game, as you normally would, then drop one of these in to keep the players guessing. Pretty soon you will have the hungering for more.

Pyramid Review

Tome And Blood (for Dungeons & Dragons)

Published by [Wizards of the Coast](#)



Written by Bruce R. Cordell and Skip Williams

96 b&w pages; \$19.95

Broken up into five chapters, *Tome And Blood* augments your options when playing a character that uses arcane magic in the new 3rd Edition of the *Dungeons & Dragons* game. In some ways, the theme of *Tome And Blood* could be everything old is new again. Chapter One, Arcane Lore, provides advice on how to create an "effective spellcaster." Some of this information is also useful for divine spellcasters, such as stat placement and feat selection. The advice goes a little beyond that found in the *Herobuilder's Guidebook*, but not much. Of more use is the section on Familiars, with lists options for small and giant sized spellcasters, as well as more powerful familiars, available to spellcasters who take the Improved Familiar feat.

Of more interest to me however, was the section on Organizations. In the days of 2nd edition, *The College of Wizardry*, by Bruce R. Cordell, introduced interesting ideas that have worked their way back to 3rd edition, including the Arcane Order itself, with its leader, Japheth Arcane updated to 3rd edition. There are other organizations such as the Bleak Academy, a guild of necromancers, the Servants of the Flame, Spellswords, and the Hollow, a mage's home. Each section has background information, membership roles, benefits, leadership notes, and where the headquarters is located. Several of the organizations have an NPC or two listed to give example of what type of spellcaster makes his home there. Several maps are also provided, including those for The Hollow and the Arcane Order.

Chapter two, feats, reprints eight feats from the *Forgotten Realms* campaign setting, but introduces sixteen additional ones. Perhaps more important than the new feats, though, are ways of using old feats. Take Improved Critical to augment your chance for a critical strike with a ray spell, or Point Blank Shot for a bonus with all rays and energy missiles within 30 feet. Among the new spells are Arcane Defense, which gives the caster a +2 on their saving throws against a chosen school, or Energy Admixture which allows a spellcaster to mix the damage up in a spell. A fireball, for instance, may have fire and acid, or fire and cold damage, instead of just fire damage. The drawback is it uses a spell slot four levels higher than the spell. There is a good attack and miscellaneous feats. Some, like the extra slot or extra spell, will help wizards and sorcerers even the odds against one another.

The real meat of this book is Chapter Three, Prestige Classes. There are fifteen prestige classes, and for once, there don't seem to be any that are recognizable as originating from another 3rd edition source. From 2nd edition? That's another story. For example, the Alienist was originally in *Spells and Magic*. This tribute to the Cthulhu Mythos is a spellcaster who knows that there are different realms with different inhabitants out there; as he gains powers in this class, he becomes more divorced from this reality as he aligns himself with the other worlds. In addition, there are two efforts to make the ultimate necromancer, the Palemaster and the True Necromancer. The former gains spells slowly, but gains special innate abilities to make up for it such as bonemail, the ability to animate dead, darkvision and summon undead. The latter becomes a more powerful spellcaster with unholy abilities such as a zone of desecration, which duplicates the Desecrate spell in a 20 foot radius, or the ultimate ability: to energy drain. Other old favorites include the updated Bladesinger, Elemental Savant (similar to the Elemental Specialist from the old *Tome of Magic*), and Mage of the Arcane Order, inspired from *College of Wizardry*. Some of the new takes are also interesting, such as the Acolyte of the Skin, a spellcaster who uses the living skin of a demon to gain power, or the Blood Magus, a mage who has come back from the dead and now uses blood to augment the way he casts his spells.

Chapter four, Tools of the Trade, is a hodgepodge of material. The section on mundane items includes the standard, lab, library, writing desk, lamp, scroll organization and other utilities, while the special items include glowpowder, healing salve, suregrip and flashpellets. Even here though, several of these items appeared in the *Forgotten Realms* campaign setting first, like the Disappearing Ink and the Scentbreaker. The section on magic items includes information on pricing magic items. Of more interest though, are the new magic items, broken up by category such as Rod, Staff, and Wondrous. Old favorites like the Golem Manual are updated, and new ones, like the Belt of Spell Resistance (21 SR) are introduced for the first time.

Chapter five, Spells, is not only new spells, but also information on weapon-like spells including how to use critical hits and sneak attacks. There are also details on creating new spells and casting spells that take longer than a single action. One of the most useful things in this chapter is the benchmark spells. These are spells that "demonstrate the maximum capability for their level and function." For example, the benchmark 5th level offensive spells are cloudkill, cone of cold, dominate person, and feeblemind. These spells allow the GM and player to look at the benchmark and decide if a new spell is too powerful or weak. The new spells are introduced in abbreviated format by level and alphabetical with a summary of what the spell does, as well as how permanency can be used with the new spells. Afterwards, the spells are listed alphabetically with full information provided. There is a lot of variety with spell damage types; for example, Acid Orb, Cold Orb, Electric Orb, Fire Orb, and Sonic Orb. Some old spells, such as Feign Death, Otiluke's Dispelling Screen, Mordenkainen's Private Sanctum, Choke, Ice Knife, Disguise Undead, Arcane Sight and others are updated to 3rd edition. These also act as benchmarks from the 2nd to 3rd edition. New spells include what might be called Animal Augmentation. These 2nd level spells all augment stats ranging from Eagle for an extra 1d4+1 for Charisma, to Fox, for an extra 1d4+1 to Intelligence, to Owl, for a 1d4+1 to Wisdom.

The book follows the same format as far as page layout and art to the previous Guidebooks, with two columns with art in top/bottom, one column or both. Wayne Reynolds, the interior artist, does a fantastic job of giving personality to the various prestige classes and illuminating how the new spells look. The editing might have been a little tighter though. For example: "Here follows several new prestige classes." "The construction and animation of a golem takes two months and costs quite a bit of money." Does that really need to be written out? Reading scores may be down, but come on, challenge us for pity's sake! One of the unusual things about these Guidebooks is that they follow no set pattern. They all have crunchy bits but don't follow the same organization. Not a bad thing in and of itself, but it might be nice to see some uniformity to their products.

Because of the material that can be found elsewhere, *Tome And Blood* is a great book if you don't own the new *Forgotten Realms* hardcover campaign setting, and is a good book if you do.

--Joe G. Kushner

Pyramid Review

The Root of All Evil (for Kingdoms of Kalamar/Dungeons & Dragons)

Published by [Kenzer And Company](#)



Written by Andy Miller

Illustrated by Hung Vinh Mac, Storn Cook, Arnie Swekel, Brad McDevitt, Matt Mitchell, Eric Olson and Allan Ditzig

64 pages; \$12.99

The *Root of All Evil* is the first scenario from Kenzer And Company for their official *Dungeons & Dragons Third Edition* campaign setting, the *Kingdoms of Kalamar*. It is designed for a group of 1st-level characters, numbering between four and six, and should provide enough experience points to take the party through to third level. One glaring omission from either front or back cover is mention of the fact that this is the first part of a trilogy, which continues with *Forging Darkness* and is completed with *Coin's End*.

This is a 64-page book that combines a small amount of background material with the scenario itself. The book is well laid-out in a smaller typeface than is the norm for many *d20* releases. One aspect of the presentation that does jar is the use of a grey background to highlight the colour text that is read out to the players as the adventure progresses. This format is perhaps a little stale and putting the colour text in boxes might have been easier upon the eye.

The most notable thing about *The Root of All Evil* is its illustrations. The book uses what Kenzer And Company terms its "ImageQUEST Adventure Illustrator." The purpose of this is to illustrate key scenes from the adventure and provides twenty pictures to this end. These are not inserted into the middle of the book as stated, but are placed at the back, and perforated for easy removal. Throughout the actual adventure, mini-versions of the illustrations appear in the sidebar to indicate that a particular illustration should be shown to the players. Although new to the *d20* system, it is not a new idea, having previously been seen years ago in many of TSR's modules for first edition *AD&D*, plus previous *Kalamar* adventures from a few years ago. The illustrations themselves are of reasonable quality, but the actual player handouts are exceptionally good.

[SPOILER ALERT]

The adventure is set along the Reanaaria Bay area of Tellene (the *Kingdoms of Kalamar* setting), south of the Lands of Skarna. Entering the town of Haanex, the party find an employment opportunity with a wizard, Voeden. He wants them to find a meteor that is supposed to be made of the rare metal, mithral. Unfortunately, the spirits of the dead purportedly guard the only map to the crater's location.

Further, once they have the map and have found the crater, the story complicates as the characters discover that someone has been there first and are mining the meteor to create a powerful magical artefact, the Coin of Power. This coin is a tool of evil; when their employer discovers its existence, Voeden asks the party to work to destroy it. If they accept, this involves them in a trip back and forth across Reanaaria Bay to the city of Zoa, and then to the jungles of Reelio in the hope that they can locate the one man who knows how to destroy the Coin. This should take several good gaming sessions for the players to complete, while also giving the characters a wide tour of Reanaaria Bay.

[SPOILER ALERT ENDS]

This is the main advantage to *The Root of All Evil* -- it does provide enough material and story for several sessions of gaming, although the actual adventure itself is solid rather than spectacular. It also gives a good variety of environments to game in, from the urban and the rural, to the city, the ocean and the jungle.

The background material in *The Root of All Evil* details the city of Zoa and is accompanied by a rather pleasing map. The short gazetteer examines the city in general, before looking at each of its neighbourhoods. In particular, it concentrates upon the areas that the characters are likely to visit during the adventure, but there is enough information for the DM to cope if they want to go elsewhere. A set of extensive encounter tables for the city of Zoa and each of the adventure's other locations is also included.

Where *The Root of All Evil* lets its audience down is in not providing a stronger sense of the setting. Were it not for the place names this could be run in any other vanilla **D&D** setting. In one sense, this makes the adventure generic enough to be slotted into most DM's own campaigns, but in this regard it does have to compete with the large number of starting adventures for **d20**. Overall, this really is for the DM who wants to run their game using the *Kingdoms of Kalamar* setting; if this is the case, then they are at least getting value for money.

--Matthew Pook (with thanks to Roj at Waylands Forge)

Pyramid Review

Hunter: The Reckoning Players Guide

Published by [White Wolf Publishing](#)



Written by Phillippe Boule, Carl Bowen, Ann Braidwood, Deid'Re M. Brooks, Ken Clieff, Tim Dedopulos, Michael Lee, Michael Mearls, Joshua Mosqueira, Sean Riley & Adam Tinworth

276 pages; \$25.95

White Wolf's Storyteller games tend to have a strange quirk for me. The base games (for me, anyways) are always playable and enjoyable. But once I've read the *Players Guide*, I often ask myself "how did I play the game before I got this?"

Hunter: the Reckoning's Players Guide starts off with the introduction of the two "lost" Vision creeds (Hunter's brand of splats). The Hermits have such a strong connection to the Messengers (the supernatural beings that bring the Hunters knowledge of the supernatural & tools to fight it) that they're crippled whenever they encounter any form of supernatural. When they're around supers or other hunters, they suffer from severe sensory overload.

The Waywards, on the other hand, are the most strident of the Hunters in terms of monster hunting. More aggressive than even the Avenger creed, they tend to view all supernaturals as 'the enemy' in a war, and they take no prisoners. This includes their fellow Hunters, as the introductory character fiction chillingly illuminates.

Following that, the book presents a new aspect to the game, giving rules to playing Bystanders.

Bystanders are Hunters stillborn by inaction. Like Hunters, they receive a calling from the Messengers. Unlike true Hunters, they find themselves paralyzed, unable to act on their new knowledge.

This portion of the book left me mildly confused. It's true that some people were complaining that *Hunter* didn't give them the chance to play unenhanced humans hunting the supernatural. My personal opinion is, of course, that such a game A) had already been released via *Hunters Hunted* and the various *Year of the Hunter* books, and B) could have been titled *Meat: the Grinding*. So, this information will more than satisfy their desires to play an unenhanced human. But will they still be following *Hunter* at this point?

Conversely, it seems likely the people who are going to buy the *Players Guide* for *Hunter* aren't going to be interested enough in playing a Bystander rather than getting 50 pages on playing Hunters. While a short (at 10 pages) section on Bystanders might have sufficed (much as similar sections have been published in *Vampire Players Guides* on playing Mortals), this much information would have been better served by being put into its own supplement. It wasn't a badly done section; I just would have preferred more information on playing Hunters, and the Bystander information to be put in its proper place.

The chapter on optional rules comes in very useful. There's a section on freeform edges (which sees *Hunter* join *Trinity* in *Mage*-izing its ruleset), and rules on how to handle level 5 edges. Let me say, it's very interesting. They emphasize that there are sacrifices that come with power for the *Hunters*; getting a level 5 edge, for example, requires serious sacrifices on the part of the character, and it drives home how twisted the mightiest Hunters become in their quest to destroy their foes. There are rules for alternate methods of increasing edges, including a method that requires

players to sacrifice their other abilities or attributes to increase their edges.

There's optional rules on character creation, including the ever popular "huge pool of Freebie points."

There's an extensive essay on True Faith, and how it does and doesn't work in the *Hunter* setting. It's an interesting look at the ability, and gets points for not just recycling rules that have been presented previously.

The information for playing Hunters is very useful. The Merits and Flaws delighted me. It seems as if the Merits and Flaws of previous games have been more or less templated off of the ones presented in the original *Vampire Players Guide*. There has been a sense of sameness about them in pretty much every *Players Guide* since; there would be a few original flaws, and the standards inserted in. *Hunter's* Merits & Flaws, however, are not the same old same old. They give opportunities to fill out Hunters as people, without the standard strangeness that pervades most M&F systems.

There are options to have bad teeth or bad breath, or just have poor online demeanor. There's no True Love merit, but you can be Lovestruck. The overall effect is that it feels like things that people can do & be; there's no "control city's police force" merit, or "doomed to a Dark Fate" flaw, but you can be homeless or an illegal immigrant (a homeless illegal immigrant, for example, has seven points in flaws right there, which is as many as you can take).

The book shines in this section because it drives home the Hunters ordinariness. In fact, that's the goal of the book as a whole: emphasize that Hunters are people who are faced with the supernatural. No Navy SEALs! No ex-CIA agents! Bricklayers! Dentists! Chauffers!

The section on backgrounds is a great look at what each of the backgrounds means, and how to use them in play. Each one gives examples of how a particular background can increase or decrease in play. It's a very useful section, and covers both the roleplaying and mechanical systems of Backgrounds.

The fourth chapter details more information on playing *Hunter*. There's information on changing your Creed, and how to emphasize the normality of a Hunter's pre-hunt life, contrasting it with their existence post-imbuing. I don't think I've ever seen a gamebook that actually had a section on faking your own death before, much less one with this much detail in it. It also has suggestions on using triggers for Hunter Edges, an optional rule from the main rulebook.

The book ends with the standard selection of essays on playing the game. There's also a section on playing child Hunters; it's an idea I don't really like, as playing a child character in the world of *Hunter* (or, for that matter, any *WoD* game) just seems unpleasant; even so, the book does do a good job of presenting it.

Another section details how Hunters will interact with the legal/penal system. This information is fairly important for a game like *Hunter*, if the GM wishes to carry the theme of responsibility on. A Hunter's actions have consequences just as surely as their inactions do, and information like this is very useful for GMs. There's even a section that gives options for continuing to play characters who've gone up the river.

Overall, I'm very pleased with the way the *Hunters Players Guide* turned out. The biggest flaw with it is the lack of an index; with the wide breadth of material that's covered, the Merits & Flaws, and the large number of new rules, it's a real strike against the book's usability. The information in here will be invaluable to helping *Hunter* players & GMs create characters for and play *Hunter*; if it were easier for them to find, it would be even better.

--Justin Mohareb

Aftershocks: Reality Quakes, Redux

"Plainly, we have to face the possibility now that reality did fracture in or about the beginning of the year 1477. Equally plainly, it is possible that fragments of that prior history have existed in ours, becoming gradually less and less 'real' as the universe moves on from the moment of fracture."

-- Pierce Ratcliff, in *Lost Burgundy: The Book of Ash, #4*, by Mary Gentle

[Last week's column](#) uncovered (or synthesized, or invented) the "reality quake," a delightfully unprovable phenomenon of vast bisociative potential. Such a convulsion overturns established history, upthrusting a new past which extends backward from the fracture point, or "eimicenter" (the linguistically picky can swap it out for "ontocenter," which is better Greek but less euphonious English) leaving only fragments of the previous reality ("pragmaclasts") visible "above ground." This week, a few more reality-penetrating tomographic pings to map the substrata of existence, and yet more fun and games for, well, fun and games. Let's see what else is shaking.

"You will understand soon. Terrible times are coming but everything will become clear. Now, you recall a catastrophic event -- the 'Crisis' -- that recently took place on this stratum? This crisis, we discovered, has resulted in the current threat to your reality. The continuum was radically altered at that time, but some holes remained, unseen, pockets of contradiction."

-- Yellow alien, in *Animal Man #12*, by Grant Morrison

By contrast to Mary Gentle's superb novel *Ash* (referenced last week), the traditional four-color superhero comic book presents reality quakes at their most common and (usually) least earth-shattering level. Seemingly blasé superheroes find themselves with new histories, powers, and arch-nemeses on an almost annual basis. This practice, "retconning" (from "retroactive continuity") doesn't often show up in supers games ("No, you've always been vulnerable to silver. Don't you remember?"), although it could in a psychological-horror supers game modeled on Grant Morrison's *Animal Man* or a more light-hearted romp based on Alan Moore's *Supreme*. However, retconning seems to be a fairly harmless practice in most four-color worlds. It might be that in such worlds superheroes act as kind of eimic shock-absorbers -- after all, the retcon waves seldom change who won World War Two, regardless of how many superheroes they remove from its battlefields.

You can take comics-style retconning into other reality-quake games, as well -- both personal reality-quakes ("No, this house has always been vacant.") and global ones. *Animal Man*, especially, provides not only a surreally menacing picture of the way that pragmaclasts (both people and items) can behave, but a deliberate tie-in to the greatest overt reality quake in comics history, the *Crisis on Infinite Earths*. Adapting a storyline of cosmic reality collisions -- or of time patrolmen unwittingly investigating the *Animal Man*-style aftershock of such a crisis -- to an Infinity, Inc. **GURPS Time Travel** game would be difficult, but the rewards of scope might be worth it.

*"The bay-trees in our country are all wither'd
And meteors fright the fixed stars of heaven;
The pale-faced moon looks bloody on the earth
And lean-look'd prophets whisper fearful change."*

-- William Shakespeare, *Richard II*, II:iv:8-12

A crisis on infinite alternate earths might wind up looking something like [Reality Sidewise](#), with Halley's Comet as its harbinger. Comets, of course, anciently signified disastrous changes, since they altered the perfect and permanent heavens. Such a reputation could, in fact, be the lingering result of a reality quake caused by a comet's disastrous passage through our previous history, or by a cometary impact. Velikovskians posit two major "quantavolutions" (perceptual reality quakes) that scramble recorded history in around 1450 B.C. and 686 B.C., caused by the dangerously close approach of the comet Venus. Could the Venusian [Mirror Realm](#) be the Preality born and then broken in the comet's passage? The [Tunguska event](#) (possibly a subliming comet impact) of 1908 might have triggered a reality quake -- could the whole unsettled, "alienated" condition of modernity simply be our global subconscious sensing that reality has been jarred loose?

Maybe Tunguska thrust us out of a steampunk (or [rocketpulp](#)) Preality, leaving only scientifiction -- and perhaps, somewhere, a warehouse full of eimically shielded ether-flyers. The timing is also suspiciously close to the Futurist Manifesto; could the Tunguska strike have shunted [Reality Futura](#) into a Preality now only dimly seen as UFOs and forgotten Italian paintings? Disaster certainly followed in the comet's wake. The records of comets might also indicate eimic fault lines, either with their appearance (1066, and one of the falls of Magellion?) or their failure to appear as predicted. The pages of Charles Fort are full of comets that defy their rightful periodicities -- has reality itself perturbed their orbits?

"Although earthquakes have often been associated with inexplicable past societal disasters, their impact has thought to be only secondary for two reasons: Inconclusive archaeological interpretation of excavated destruction, and misconceptions about patterns of seismicity. However, a better understanding of the irregularities of the time-space patterns of large earthquakes suggest that earthquakes (and associated tsunamis) have probably been responsible for some of the great and enigmatic catastrophes in ancient times. The most relevant aspect of seismicity is the episodic time-space clustering of earthquakes . . ."

-- Amos Nur, "The Collapse of Societies by Giant Earthquakes" (abstract)

Suspiciously tight [planetary alignments](#) might also cause reality quakes, instead of conventional earthquakes or [pole shifts](#), in a kind of ontological "Jupiter Effect." The Piri Reis Map and other alleged evidences of a historical pole shift might, in fact, be pragmaclasts. Or, of course, a reality quake might legitimately trigger other purely physical traumas. The massive wave of earthquakes that seems to coincide with the end of the Bronze Age in 1200 B.C. (another possible Velikovskian quantavolution date, and the beginning of the most reliably [hollow history](#)) could simply be the material tremors from an eimic fault-slip. Vulcanism, too, may either be symptomatic or causative of reality quakes -- the famous volcanic "year without a summer" in 1816 strikes me as very suspicious indeed, when you consider that Frankenstein's monster and the modern vampire both emerged from that dust cloud. A similar climatic "dolorous blow" struck in 535-536 A.D. that may have triggered the death of Arthur, the plague of Justinian, the migration of the Avars, the collapse of the Jin in China and Teotihuacan in Mexico, and the rise of Arabian messianism. According to M.G.L. Baillie, the culprit is a cometary impact (or possibly the Tauride meteors); according to David Keys' *Catastrophe*, it was an immense volcano in Java. Either way, it makes a suspiciously good eimic fracture zone for history.

"I understand how things could be left over. No process is perfect, the universe is large and complex, and what Ash and the Wild Machines did -- it's not surprising if some of the evidence of the first history wasn't expunged. Reality has its own weight. It's been gradually squeezing the anomalies out -- things becoming legendary, mythic, fictional."

-- Pierce Ratcliff, in *Lost Burgundy: The Book of Ash, #4*, by Mary Gentle

King Arthur is obviously the "Ash" of that 535 event; his eimic signature continues to radiate even fifteen centuries later. The Holy Grail, then, might simply be an incredibly powerful pragmaclast, a piece of the previous reality possessed of literally transcendental powers. Perhaps the Grail is simply the core of the comet that struck our previous reality; recall that to Wolfram, the Grail was the *lapis ex caelis*, the Stone Fallen From Heaven. As the actual proximate cause of the reality quake, the Grail-comet's eimic dosage might vastly increase the unreality (or unknowability, in a more Heisenbergian sense) in those who see it (or guard it, or drink from it). The power of a pragmaclast such as the Grail could wipe people from continuity, or give them superpowers, or awaken their magick, or simply make them very eimically-sensitive, able to see the echoes and ghosts of the forgotten history.

"It seems reasonable to suppose that the cuts [in the Encyclopedia of Tlön] obey the intent to set forth a world that is not too incompatible with the real world. The spread of Tlönian objects through various countries would complement the plan Almost immediately, reality 'caved in' at more than one point. The truth is, it wanted to cave in."

-- Jorge Luis Borges, "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius"

And some of those echoes, and ghosts, and remnants, might not like being forgotten. They, too, might possess greater levels of eimic radiation -- with concomitant weird powers -- slowly decaying over time. (This, it suddenly occurs to me, is the best explanation for [faeries](#) that I've ever come up with -- it explains their archaism, their ties to poetry and legend, their creepy reality- and time-distorting powers, and their cringing need for human belief and company.) Couple such powers with the knowledge that reality quakes do occur, and the pragmaclastic entities might actually be

able to reverse the fracture, or at least set off another one just as good at the same fault line. The qliphoth, those shells of God's first creation, are the quintessential pragmaclasts, plotting to infect the new reality with eimic "radiation sickness." The Lemurians, or any of Madame Blavatsky's disturbing giant psychic shamblers, also make superb pragmaclastic species, as do the [sphinxes](#) I posited earlier. In his own alternate chronology, Isaac Newton gives 958 B.C. as the date when Oedipus kills the Sphinx of Thebes, a fine date for an eimicenter.

"There are mad and beautiful things beneath the skin of the world we know, that you only see when you look at things on a planetary scale. What if, underneath all that, there was an entire classic old superhero world? What if there were huge Jack Kirby temples underground built by old gods or new, and ghostly cowboys riding the highways of the West for justice, and superspies in natty suits and 360-degree-vision shades fighting cold wars in the dark, and strange laughing killers kept in old Lovecraftian asylums . . . what if you had a hundred years of superhero history just slowly leaking out . . . ?"

-- Warren Ellis, original proposal for *Planetary*

The greatest thing that reality quakes do for your game is open it up into a whole new dimension. You can put anything you like, from [influencing engines](#) to [griffins](#) to the [Iron Chef](#), underneath the strata of reality for your players to dig out. Or, to add familiarity along with surreality, previous campaigns can eimically "leak" into new ones, reintroducing villains and artifacts in a quasi-Moorcockian avalanche of archetype. Anywhere can be an eimic subduction zone, any legend can leave peculiar traces in the grimmest and grittiest reality -- perhaps the [Empire State Building](#) focuses eimic energies through [sacred geometry](#), and keeps Doc Savage's eyrie waiting for him on an unused floor in case a new temblor shakes him back into existence. Eimic fracture points can be places of mystery, dungeon [tunnels](#) to adventure, or bad places boiling with vengeful pragmaclastic Things That (literally) Should Not Be. The past isn't what it used to be, and it doesn't have to be like it was. Shake it up, baby.

Eggs, Milk, Bread, Visit the Dreaming . . .

I've received some criticisms in the past for the focus of both my column and many articles here in *Pyramid* towards GMs. Well, I'm willing to grant that point, to a certain extent. In my mind, though, it's because the GM has a fair bit more responsibility than the players. At the core, as a GM I need my players to:

- Show up.

Ideally, they will do at least half of the following:

- Bring their character sheets.
- Bring dice.
- Bring money for pizza.
- Avoid setting fire to myself and/or all my worldly belongings.

(As an aside, Dennis, I'm *so* sorry for that time I stupidly forgot my character sheets. Okay . . . those couple of times. All right . . . those many, many times. Getting me tattooed was a good idea.)

Now, my players *can* do lots more, if they want, but they don't have to. In comparison, if a GM doesn't do a bare minimum amount of work, then the evening's entertainment will probably consist of the adventure "Night of the Pointless Batches of 2d6 Zombies." And GMs tend to burn through a lot more material than players; an article with, say, more weapons or combat options for **Butt: The Kicking** will give players lots to tinker with for months, while an adventure or new critter is generally a one-use type of article. (Of course, GM advice articles and campaign settings have a bit longer shelf life . . . and GMs get to play with new weapons and combat options, too.)

On the other hand, there are scads more players than GMs. And, despite my comparative inexperience with being a player, I'm sure there are lots of potential articles out there that can be targeted towards players (would-be writers: hint, hint).

(As a side note, articles for players often tend to revolve around new toys, character classes, and abilities for PCs, which are notoriously difficult to balance, plus make cool/interesting/different enough. While there's always a demand for neat-o abilities, I'd also love to see some good player advice-type articles. And, of course, anything that "surprises us.")

Anyway, for those of you wanting a more player-centric column, here ya go.

One of the big semi-secrets of many GMs is that we often don't have a clue what to do for your characters. Oh, sure, we can sling evil temples, dinosaurs, and devilfish at you with a cackling abandon, but anything specifically targeted can be problematic. We can throw challenges at your characters, we can reward your characters, and we can mess with your characters (if you like that kind of thing . . . I'm a personal fan of the Lipton Cup of Angst school of play, myself). But we don't, intuitively, know what to *do* with your characters, individually.

So, tell us.

If you'd like a storyline where your character is framed for murdering a member of his religious order, jot it on a note and give it to your GM. If you want a romantic interest to pop up, let us know. If you want a long-lost sister to turn up so you can explore a familial storyline, tell us!

Of course, one of the problems I originally had with this idea (both as a player and a GM) is that it's nowhere near as exciting to have your GM do exactly what you tell him as having a surprising storyline just erupt. But there's a way around that, too.

Buckshot.

See, if you give your GM enough ideas of what you'd like to have happen for your character, then whatever option they end up choosing -- or modifying -- will probably be surprising.

As an example, here's a (changed, mutated, and culled from memories long since thought dead and buried) list that I would have given my GM during a *Vampire: The Dark Ages* campaign.

1. Alyse [my character] wouldn't mind exploring the Dreaming in an effort to gather scientific evidence.
2. Alyse faked her death to escape her past, but there are enough clues that intelligent enough antagonists could piece together what happened. (For that matter, so could *good* people . . . or perhaps those who simply wish to blackmail Alyse into doing her bidding.)
3. A romantic subplot could be interesting; perhaps a Stone Walker or kin?
4. If a significant enough opportunity to learn and do research would present itself, she'd probably jump at the chance. Maybe the Hermetics?
5. What if one of Alyse's inventions were used for a sinister purpose? Would she be blamed? Would she care?
6. If Alyse were exposed to a significant enough "proof" or example of a miracle, it might reaffirm her lagging faith in the church. Of course, what would happen if it wasn't the standard Christian church? Alyse, the heathen . . .
7. Alyse still has that "mysterious pale gentleman" in her background story (I've always presumed it was a vampire). What if he tracks her down? (Or what if her experimentation with Entropy magicks have a backlash that "coincidentally" draws him here?)
8. (. . . and so on)

So now my GM has a dozen or so story ideas, any of which can be used or modified into an adventure, subplot, or other opportunity. And, since I provided so many ideas, I *still* won't have much of a clue what's going on when one of these plots starts. Is the shady figure that just showed up the vampire from the past? A Hermetic mage? A new love interest?

Also note that when I give these lists to my GM, I try to offer a range of possibilities, from more-or-less fleshed out adventure ideas, to tiny snippets of ideas to make the GM think. Perhaps as important as the ideas on the list, though, are the meta-ideas therein. For example, the first item mentions that Alyse wouldn't mind exploring the Dreaming (in the World of Darkness, the realm of dreams [duh] and the fae). In that case, she probably wouldn't mind exploring other odd surreal realms, like the Umbra or France. Making extrapolations based on these lists is a good way to figure out what would be interesting to the player and/or character.

Even if you're not as interested in AngstVision Roleplaying, giving your GM lists of what you want to do can still be useful. If your character wants to be the best sword fighter in the realm, then the GM needs to know so he can introduce opportunities for this to (someday) be true . . . perhaps allowing him to introduce lesser fighters to compete against, royal competitions to enter, and so on. Likewise, if you want your character to learn the Big Secret of Crystal Mountain, then the GM needs to know that so he can drop the clues and prepare the adventures leading up to The Secret. (And, of course, giving him plenty of time to *create* the big Secret . . .) Even short- and medium-term goals are good things to put on these lists; telling your GM at the beginning of the adventure that you want to kidnap the crown price is *much* more likely to frustrate everyone than telling him at the end of the adventure for next time. And if you absolutely *hate* mystery adventures, this is a good opportunity to make that opinion known, too.

Players of the world: Tell your GM what kind of adventures you'd like! We're not mind readers, and the easiest way to make sure you get to play the kind of adventures or subplots you want is to make those possibilities known.

* * *

As an aside, I'd like to point out that the idea of internal consistency appears in this week's article "Sucking Them In." It also showed up in last week's Random Thought Table. I swear to the gawds, I'm not ripping anyone off! I've been ranting about IC for years . . . just ask my (sick & tired) friends. <*grin*>

* * *

As another aside, I'm pretty low on non-*d20* reviews currently. Game companies *are* releasing some other stuff currently, right? Tell the world about 'em, then!

* * *

As a third aside, John Kovalic is busy as all get-out currently, so we're skipping Murphy's Rules this week. (*Insert Joke About Murphy's Rules Being Appropriately Named Here.*)

--*Steven Marsh*

* * *

*Last week's answer: **Illuminati: New World Order**, Revolution! card.*

(*Four stars*) "E.B. Whattling was the Vyllage junkman for many years until a run-in with the local tax assessors put an end to the business. What wasn't sold at greatly reduced prices was given away or confiscated by the King's men for payment of back taxes. Bitter and broken, Whattling retired to his small, but comfortable, home on the outskirts of the Vyllage. His only company his his [*sic*] half-dog, half-wolf pet, Laddie, who makes his home behind his master's house in an old packing crate."

Dork Tower!



Dork Tower!





by Dylan Craig

Gustomancy: The Art of Eating

Gustomancers like to eat. Like their fellow adepts, this is more than a simple craving for tasty food; it's a spiritual obsession with the process of eating, digesting, and drawing nourishment from edible material. Many gustomancers are superb chefs; others are food critics, and others do nothing more than keep the frozen meal shelves at their local supermarket empty.

Because their magic involves the consumption of large amounts of food, many gustomancers are grossly overweight. However, this is not always the case. Gustomancers blessed with a high metabolism, or who spend most of their day at the gym, will not conform to this stereotype. In fact, the diet of a muscle-packed powerlifter is perfectly appropriate for the lifestyle of a gustomancer. It's not what you do with the calories that counts; it's getting them in in the first place that holds the magic. Gustomancers are known as gobblers in the Occult Underground.

Enjoy a hearty meal? Well, grab a spoon, the fun's just starting.

Gustomancy Blast Style: Gustomancers inflict damage through cramping their victim's digestive system. A minor blast feels like acute gas pains; a significant blast can rupture the stomach, kink an intestine, or induce crippling bouts of nausea. A major blast would literally cause a victim (or, several victims) to explode in a shower of methane and internal organs. Gustomancers can only target entities with a physical digestion system with this spell; ghosts, cars, and clockworks are unaffected, but zombies, animals, and bloodsucking specters are.

Generate a Minor Charge: Eat enough food to last a normal human a full day, at one sitting. In calorie terms, this amounts to around 2000 calories; in serving terms, this is roughly the same as eating three full meals. The food can be of any type, from raw steak to breakfast cereal to fast food, but it must be consumed all at once, without interruption. Nibbling away over the course of an afternoon is no good.

Generate a Significant Charge: Eat a similar amount as would be required to generate a minor charge, and in the same conditions, but this food must be of superlative quality, as would only be available at a gourmet restaurant. In addition, the meal must include all the normal side-options (fine wine, hors d'oeuvres, wafer-thin mints, etc.). Such a meal might cost in excess of \$300; alternately, it may be cooked by the gustomancer themselves for a mere \$100 in ingredients, but this would require a Gourmet Cooking skill roll in excess of 30%.

Generate a Major Charge: Eat a meal which has never been prepared before, or will never be prepared again. The easy combinations (like peanut butter and caviar chili, or narwhal steak) have all been done by gustomancers in ages past, but of course there's no way of knowing that without trying. Alternately, a dish prepared by a chef with a skill in excess of 80% who retires immediately after cooking it would qualify; if the chef ever cooks a gourmet meal again, the gustomancer immediately loses a major charge, or 10 significant charges if they do not hold a major charge.

Taboos: While gustomancers may have dietary restrictions (vegan, kosher, halal, or salt-free, for instance), diet

foodstuffs are anathema to them. Should a gustomancer ever eat food which has had any portion of its natural nutritive content removed, he or she immediately loses all stored charges. Note that gustomancers may still prepare food in a healthy manner by cooking with olive oil rather than butter, avoiding fatty spreads, and so on; they may just not take the 'easy option' of diet food.

In addition, underfed people, those with eating disorders (bulimia, anorexia) or dietary syndromes (kwashiorkor, lactose-intolerance) leech charges away from gustomancers by skin contact. Each such contact removes a minor charge from the gustomancer; when he or she has no more minor charges, a significant charge is lost instead, and so on. These charges are transferred directly to the leeching party as the same amount of nutrition they initially provided to the gustomancer. A gustomancer takes 5 Wound Points for every charge lost in this manner, but these points may be regained at a rate of 10 points per normal meal portion or 5 points per sugary drink. A gustomancer who is killed by wounds of this type dies of malnutrition! Gustomancers can never drain each other in this manner.

A gustomancer also loses one charge (starting with his or her highest) for every day in which they eat less than 4000 calories (six full meals).

Random Magick Domains: If it concerns food, can be eaten, or is capable of eating, a gustomancer can affect it. Even billboards carrying food ads can be targeted.

Starting Charges: A gustomancer starts with five minor charges, but a significant charge is only a gourmet restaurant away. A gobbler can accumulate 5-7 minor charges per week with little effort, but accumulating multiple significant charges will be tricky unless (a) they can prepare their own food, or (b) have enough status that they can get away with ordering a table-full of food at high-class restaurants without being asked to leave.

Becoming a big lard-butt:

Yup, if a gustomancer isn't careful, they'll have more than flabby thighs or a spare tyre to worry about. Every day that a gobbler exceeds normal consumption, he or she gains a point in a Body skill called Overweight. A character cannot gain more than 3 Overweight points per week. This skill can be applied as a threshold, at the GMs discretion, to any skill except Mind skills. In other words, if your roll for a skill falls under your Overweight total, it fails -- your physical state somehow got in the way. The Overweight skill tops out at 2/3 of the Body score. Each point of Overweight represents about 2-3% additional mass.

Overweight can be worked off; for every day of light exercise (1-2 hours), the Overweight skill can be dropped by 1 point. For every day of intensive exercise (2-3 hours), usually involving a personal trainer, Overweight drops by 2; however, a character may only perform such high-burn exercise once per week for every 15 points they have in Body, or twice per 15 points if they have a Body-related Obsession skill. All modifications to the Overweight skill are applied at the end of a week; barring magical effects, nobody gains or loses weight overnight.

Diets drop the Overweight total by 5 to 10 points a month -- any "cheating" during this month starts the month over from scratch. Starvation diets -- during which the dieter eats, literally, nothing -- drop Overweight by 5 points a week, but also inflict 1d10 Wound Points per day after the second, and drop the dieter's Body by 1d10 points per week. Half of the Body points lost in this way are lost permanently, the other half can be regained at a rate of 1 per week of normal eating (or overeating).

Gustomancy Minor Formula Skills

Savory Outlook

Cost: 1 minor charge

By using this spell, a gustomancer can change a single property of a portion of food to whatever he or she desires. A steak could be changed from rare to well done; a crumbed chicken breast could be changed to a crumbed pork chop.

Bloat

Cost: 1 minor charge

This is the gustomancer's minor blast spell.

Iron Stomach Lining

Cost: 2 minor charges

While this spell is in effect (it lasts until the end of the target's next meal), the target may flip-flop any rolls to resist the effects of a consumed substance, be it poison, hallucinogens, alcohol, or just throat-searing chili powder.

I'm Thin Inside

Cost: 2 minor charges, +1 per 10 minutes of operation

This spell allows the target to avoid any effects of being Overweight for its duration. The character physically shrinks; this, of course, has repercussions for clothing size or the state of any restraints currently affecting the character.

Fat Power

Cost: 3 minor charges

This spell allows a character to add his or her Overweight skill to one of their Body or Soul skills for one roll only. If you've ever seen a 350 lb. man long-jump like an Olympic athlete or sing like Pavarotti (hey... wait a minute), you will appreciate this spell's startling power.

Food Detective

Cost: 4 minor charges

By eating a small portion of the remains of a meal, the gustomancer can zero in on the current location and activities of any person(s) who originally ate it. This impression lasts a few seconds only, and can only be performed once per given meal. The morsels eaten can be no more than a shred of garnish or ketchup drip stuck to the inside of a fast-food container; the spell still works.

Gustomancy Significant Formula Skills

Eat This

Cost: 1 significant charge

This is the gustomancer's significant blast.

I Could Eat A Horse

Cost: 2 significant charges

You could also eat a car tyre. Or a handful of iron filings. The gobbler gains the ability to derive nutrition from any physical substance as if it were an equal weight of oatmeal porridge. This spell doesn't render the substance more malleable, but it makes it tasty (car tyres, according to gobblers, taste like licorice), and protects the consumer from any ill-effects associated with eating it. So: iron filings won't scratch the gustomancer's throat; a turpentine-paint cocktail won't poison them. This spell applies to the gobbler and a companion, if he or she wishes (hey, eating's a social pastime). For every extra significant charge expended, the gobbler can double the number of people it effects. Hence, for 2 additional charges, 8 people can chow down. Watching such a meal is an Unnatural-3 stress; participating is closer to level 5 or 7, depending on the 'foodstuff' being eaten. The substances eaten do not count towards accumulating charges.

Eat Your Heart Out

Cost: 3 significant charges

By casting this spell, the gustomancer 'eats' a target's appetite. He or she no longer feels hungry; in fact, eating any meal makes him or her feel bloated and unwell (-10 to all skills). This penalty lasts 24 hours, and is cumulative. If they don't eat, or eat too little, they begin starving, as detailed above. On the other hand, the gustomancer's appetite doubles; he or she must eat an additional person's worth of food every day, or suffer the penalties of starvation themselves. Extra food eaten as the result of this spell does not count towards accumulating charges. If the target can maintain a normal diet for a week, the spell ends.

Slim Jim

Cost: 4 significant charges

Who needs Weight Watchers? This spell lasts until the gustomancer next accumulates a charge, and triples the number of Overweight points lost through exercise or dieting. Even if the gustomancer does nothing but sit on their butt and watch TV, he or she will still shed 2 points of Overweight every week.

Appetite for Life

Cost: 5 significant charges

Powerful gustomancers can use stored fat to heal injuries. This spell can be cast on a receptive target or the gustomancer him- or herself; either way, the recipient of the spell must be able to eat, and must do so while the spell is in effect. For every dice roll of Overweight points that are burned, one target's can be completely healed of any damage suffered since their last meal. This spell may also be used to cure diseases or reverse poisons; the effects in such cases are left to the GMs discretion. If the results of a dice roll ever cause the gobbler to lose more Overweight points than he or she has, the excess is taken from their Body stat. If a gobbler casts this spell on him- or herself, the spell only requires minor charges rather than significant ones.

Gustomancy Major Effects

Completely alter (spoil, re-garnish, animate) all foodstuffs in a supermarket; render someone unable to ever eat again, or free them from the need for nourishment; raise someone from the dead by throwing a massive banquet and harvesting the vital energies thus released.

Sample Gustomancer: Bern Ridgeway

Bern was a quiet kid who lived with his parents in the Midwest until a tragic road accident claimed their lives when he was eight. He grew up lonely and unhappy under the sometime care of an aunt in Boulder. When Bern was eighteen, having dropped out of school, he took a job at the local diner, where he met Salvatore Pelli. Salvatore worked as a cook, but more importantly, he was a childless man from a long line of gustomancers, and he was looking for someone to pass his knowledge on to. Bern learned quickly, and when he had learned everything Salvatore knew, he set off looking for some way to put his arcane skills to use. Bern is now a consulting counsellor at a home for emotionally troubled teens, and heads the eating-disorder unit. In his capacity as a therapist, he often uses his ability to bleed nutrition into others to bring malnourished kids back from the brink of death without having to resort to drip feeds or force-feeding. Between his magickal skills and his ability to provide therapy, his unit has one of the highest success rates in the world. Bern is happy in his work, but has yet to learn to deal with the anxiety associated with releasing kids back into the destructive environments that created their disorders; this stress is the factor behind the failed and hardened notches in his Helplessness gauge. Bern's lifelong love is modern dance; he often teaches dancing techniques to his patients to assist their development of higher self-esteem.

Personality: Two parts William Dafoe, one part the older brother you never had

Obsession: Building a better society, piece by piece, by working with damaged kids

Wound Points: 55

Passions

Rage Stimulus: Parents who neglect or abuse their children

Fear Stimulus: (Helplessness) Losing a patient

Noble Stimulus: Helping unhappy kids lead better lives

Stats

Body: 55 (Comfortable) **Speed:** 60 (Like the Wind) **Mind:** 50 (Quick thinker) **Soul:** 55 (Humble)

Skills

Body Skills: Frontier Metabolism 35, Wrestling 20, General Athletics 15, Keep Fit 15 **Mind Skills:** Notice 30, General Education 20, Teach 15 **Speed Skills:** Dance 50, Driving 15, Dodge 15, Do Two Things at Once 15 **Soul Skills:** Lie 15, Charm 15, Repair Tortured Psyche 30, Magick: Gustomancy 40

Frontier Metabolism: Bern heals at twice the normal rate, and gains twice the normal benefit for exercise or dieting. Also, Whenever Bern receives medical treatment, he may flip-flop a successful result to determine how many Wound Points are restored, if the original medical aid roll is also under his Frontier Metabolism skill.

Charges: Bern rarely has more than 3-4 minor charges and 1-2 significant charges at any time

Madness Meter

Violence Unnatural Helplessness Isolation Self

0 Hard 0 Hard 0 Hard 2 Hard 1 Hard

0 Failed 0 Failed 0 Failed 2 Failed 1 Failed

Equipment

Palmtop computer, credit cards, cell phone, digital camera

* * *

Conspiromancy: The Power of Rumor

The human race is a funny thing. Most of the calamities, genocides, and mysterious events it experiences are terrifying enough on a mundane level, yet it insists on creating illogical and ethereal beliefs to explain them, some of which do little but add terror value to the event. Conspiromancy grew out of the paranoia and conspiracy mentality of the 1950s and 60s, and the media environment which has propagated it. Conspiromancy operates like a hybrid of Cryptomancy and Iconomancy; by harvesting the power generated by urban legends and rumors, the Conspiromancer gains the power to make them real. Conspiromancers are known as whisperers in the Occult Underground.

Whisperers gain charges by spreading ideas which may be true or untrue, but are not independently verifiable by their recipients. In other words, the people who are to believe in the idea (rumor, conspiracy theory, etc.) must not have the immediate means of discovering whether what they have just heard or read is true. "Immediate," in this case, means, "attainable within a few minutes;" in other words, a phone call or a moment's collected thought away. Spreading a rumor about a new political party is no good, unless the conpiromancer can also furnish an explanation as to why the event has not made the papers; starting a rumor that the Post Office is compiling a DNA database by culturing saliva

traces from envelope seams, with some paper-thin evidence to support this (like "anonymous testimonies" from postal employees), is far more powerful. Urban legends, of course, are the cash cows of the whisperer framework, and supermarket tabloids and forwarded e-mails are their bread and butter.

That's what I heard, anyway.

Blast Style: Conspirancers have a blast spell, all right, and it's a doozy. However, their blast formula spell (Black Book Bioweapon), while requiring significant charges to cast, only does minor-blast damage if the target makes a successful Mind roll to resist the effect.

Generate a Minor Charge: Start a rumor that is believed by more than a dozen people. As a general rule, anywhere between 10 and 75 percent of people exposed to a rumor will believe in it strongly enough to be useful in terms of supplying power for the charge; the exact percentage depends on the target group. The charge gained only lasts 24 hours, which is the rumor's effective life span as far as siphoning energy from the collective unconscious goes.

Generate a Significant Charge: Start a rumor that is believed by more than a hundred people, with the same parameters as those outlined for the minor charge. This charge only lasts a week. However, rumors generated within a "snowballing media" (such as e-mail or gossipy manicurists) may instead be used to deliver one minor charge per calendar month (for 2d10 months) instead of one significant charge straight away; these minor charges do not dissipate after 24 hours.

Generate a Major Charge: Start a rumor which has a literally global effect. The growth of central news agencies and the growing exposure of gullible members of the public to high concentrations of information have made this a more attainable goal, but generating a major charge should still be a major project involving a great deal of luck or forward planning. Major charges only last one month; however, they can be broken down into a steady "drip" of one significant charge per month for 2d10 months, or one minor charge per month for 2d100 months as detailed above.

Taboos: Have a rumor you started be conclusively debunked in the national media or subculture you started it in. Not only does this lose you all your charges, it also means that all conspirant magic worked anywhere in the world for the next 24 hours requires 1 extra charge, of whatever type, to cast. Sloppy or implausible conspirancers are often hunted down and iced by their own kind.

Random Magick Domains: While their formula spells have fairly physical effects, conspirancers can only affect people's perceptions, memories, and reactions with their random magick.

Starting Charges: A conspirancer starts off with six minor charges, and can easily gain three or four more per week, or a significant charge if they are willing to spend a whole week working full-time to set it up.

Conspirancy Minor Formula Skills

Well, Can You Disprove It?

Cost: 1 minor charge

After all, it might be true. When a conspirancer lays this spell on someone, the target has to roll three dice instead of two, and put together the worst possible result as their total, when making rolls to detect lies or notice deceptions. The effect lasts as many minutes as the sum of the dice the conspirancer rolled to cast the spell. This spell may be cast to 'prep' a target for Black Book Bioweapon (described below).

Aren't You . . .

Cost: 2 minor charges

. . . alive and flipping burgers in a golden arches in Idaho? By casting this spell, the adept can alter a target's appearance so that it almost, but not quite, matches the appearance of another person -- whom the caster must have a

photo of or be familiar with. The match isn't close enough to defeat close scrutiny, but it will fool far-off or cursory examination, or provide a "family resemblance."

Don't Accept Drinks from Strangers

Cost: 3 minor charges

After all, you never know what they might be slipping you. If an adept can dip his or her finger into a substance which is to be consumed and cast this spell, the substance gains strong sedative powers. Roll the dice; if the total is lower than the target's Body characteristic, he or she gains a shift equal to the sum of the two dice, rounded down to the nearest ten, for a period of an hour. If the roll is a match, or greater than the target's Body stat, they will gain a -20% shift every minute (that's 1% a round, if you need to break it down), until their penalty exceeds their Body stat, at which point they will pass out for an hour or so.

Asbestos Lining

Cost: 4 minor charges

It's all about making you bleed faster. Casting this spell on someone who is bleeding or wounded greatly increases the rate at which they are losing blood. Characters with minor wounds (cuts, nosebleeds, menstruation) begin losing a mugful of blood every minute (that's about 1 Wound Point every second round); characters with serious wounds (knife slashes, bullet wounds) lose slightly more (1 Wound Point every round). Nastier still, for an extra minor charge, the spell can be cast the round before a wound is inflicted; this lets adepts "prep" a target before laying a hurting on them, which really gets the gore flowing. The bleeding lasts until first aid is applied; rest, icepacks, and so on halve the rate of loss.

It's In The Tapwater

Cost: 5 minor charges

Or fresh air. Or fabric softener. Or your favorite brand of fast food. Or the radiation from your TV. When casting this spell, the conspiromancer must nominate a medium, such as one of those listed above, and a target. If the spell is successful, the conspiromancer becomes aware every time the target comes into contact with the medium, and may cast spells directly on the target at no penalty. The link lasts a week, or until a spell is sent through it, and must be cast in the presence of the target and medium. Countermeasures such as turning off the TV, avoiding fast food, drinking only boiled or bottled water, etc., are effective in postponing the effects of the spell, but do not break the link; in addition, the conspiromancer may keep the link active until the target makes his or her fateful slip-up by simply expending another 5 minor charges at the end of the week.

Conspiromancy Significant Formula Skills

Men In Black

Cost: 1 significant charge, plus 1 significant charge per agent created

And not the rapping kind, either. This spell causes uses the power of the collective unconscious to create simulacra which walk, talk, and pack heat just like the shadowy government agents they represent. These figures appear as nondescript men and women in dark suits, with earpiece communicators, Glock automatics, and whatever other equipment is appropriate for their presence -- if two or more agents are created, they will have a black sedan; four or more would have a panel-van, or maybe even a helicopter. The agents can only exist when witnesses to their existence are around; if no-one can see them, or pays attention to them, they disappear. Otherwise, they have standard stats for police officers (UA, pg.211), and will obey a single command-phrase given during their summoning -- "Shoot those guys," "Stop that car," or "Protect me" are some examples -- until they disappear (which will happen in ten minutes, if not before).

Just Because You're Paranoid

Cost: 2 significant charges

... doesn't mean they're not after you. For the next 24 hours, everyone the target encounters will act one grade worse towards him. People who used to like him now come across fairly cool; people who used to dislike him now bubble with rage when he approaches and will go out of their way to make his life difficult. This antipathy is fairly subtle; if those affected are questioned, they will brush off any mention of their altered behavior with words to the effect of "I'm just not in the mood for his crap today." Any initiatives on the part of the characters' new enemies will remain in character; in other words, an angry colleague might fire off a rant to the target's boss, a neighbor might engage in a yelling session over the back fence, and so on. Only a capo would be likely to tell one of his boys to "take care of dis little problem;" regular Joes, unless provoked, will not exceed what they consider to be justifiable levels of violence or aggression.

CIA Mind Control

Cost: 3 significant charges

Look what it did to Mark Chapman. More importantly, look what it did to John Lennon. This spell plants a powerful command into the target's subconscious, which can be activated at any time during the next year by a spoken phrase or visual cue of the caster's choice. The command may be of high complexity; the target will deal with any such complexities to the best of their abilities. For instance, a command such as "kill the President" would result in the target planning the hit, getting a weapon, buying a ticket to Washington, and so on. If the command is completely against the target's own interests, he or she may struggle against the urge by making a Mind roll; failure means that the target performs the actions required by the command, success means that the target can hold off the impulse to obey the command for 24 hours, and a matched success means that the target has thrown off the command and is once again in charge of their own actions.

Black Book Bioweapon

Cost: 4 significant charges

They say the Russians developed it. Or maybe it was the gays. Or it came from lab monkeys. Whatever the case, it's here, now, in the collective unconscious, and a conziromancer can make it hatch right out of your cells and turn your body to soup -- if you believe. When a target is hit with this spell, they have to make a Mind check. If they pass -- no problem. They take damage as if they'd been hit with a minor blast, and apart from a high fever and some joint pains, they'll be fine. If they fail their Mind check, they're in trouble. They take major-blast damage every day until they die, the spell is broken, or the conziromancer breaks taboo or ends the spell. Hospitalization allows each day's damage to be reduced through triage, but the victim will still lose 1 point from their Body stat each day, until the spell ends or they die. The disease, while completely noninfectious, looks like the worst kind of Technicolor bastard child of Ebola, AIDS, and cancer you could imagine.

We Have The Technology

Cost: 5 significant charges

Jet engines that run on water, handkerchiefs that stop bullets, laser guns -- this spell turns the conziromancer into a veritable catalogue of Hangar 18 goodies. The spell has to be cast separately for each machine whose operation is "modified," but apart from that, there are few parameters -- except that the effect must be presented in such a way that is plausible to any onlookers. If a conziromancer has been driving around in his Fiat all day, and now needs it to fly, he might choose to back the spell up by popping the hood, fiddling with the engine out of sight of his passengers, and then triumphantly explaining that he's "reset the hidden antigravity module" that "comes standard with all engines these days, but they don't want ordinary folk to know about it so the airlines can keep their monopoly." Justifications of this sort are what should stop conziromancers relying on this spell to grant outlandish powers to mundane items; remember that should anyone debunk the conziromancer's explanation of how the item does what it is doing -- say, by dismantling the engine afterwards, or pointing out some flaw in the conziromancer's reasoning -- the conziromancer loses all his or her charges, and any active spells he or she has up. Conversely, characters who suspect that the conziromancer is feeding them a line of bull, but keep quiet to benefit from the effects of this spell, should be

making checks on their Self and The Unnatural gauges -- self-deception coming, as it does, with a price tag.

Conspiromancy Major Effects

Add a new entry into the set of what most people in a given society consider as to be "incontrovertible fact;" create a real, permanent instance of an existing phenomenon (such as a flying saucer, stuffed with Greys bent on human experimentation).

Sample Conspiromancer: Orpheus Brown

People who know Orpheus claim that he got into chauffeuring just so he could have a captive audience to share his conspiracy theories with, but Orpheus himself claims that it was the other way around; that he got interested in the Truth after eavesdropping on some of the conversations he heard in the back of his limo, when various important passengers had a few too many drinks under their belts. Orph wasn't formally trained as an adept, and has little idea of the Occult Underground; his powers were awakened through a year-long correspondence with a hooded figure known only as 'King Daddy', who claimed to live in the sewers under the city. Orph's natural curiosity did the rest, and what he wasn't taught came naturally; he was soon a full-fledged conspiromancer, one of a mere handful across the country. He still receives occasional messages from his mentor, and his limo has carried King Daddy through the darkened streets on several occasions.

Personality: Libra -- "The race is long, and in the end, it's only with yourself"

Obsession: Discovering, and spreading, the Truth

Wound Points: 35.

Passions

Rage Stimulus: Faceless bureaucracy

Fear Stimulus: (Violence) Vicious dogs

Noble Stimulus: Orpheus is a pacifist, and won't raise a hand in anger except to save a life.

Stats

Body: 35 (Potato with Limbs)

Speed: 60 (P.D.Q.)

Mind: 65 (Lots of Potential)

Soul: 70 (Humble)

Body Skills: Smoke, Drink, and Stay Alive 30, Struggle 20, General Athletics 15

Speed Skills: High Pressure Driving 55, Dodge 35

Mind Skills: Notice 25, General Education 15, Tabloid Trivia 35, Sports Trivia 20

Soul Skills: Outrageous Lie 25, Charm 25, Conspiromancy 50

Charges: Orpheus has lots of long-term rumors circulating, and can count on 5-7 minor charges and at least one significant charge per week.

Madness Meter Violence Isolation Self Helplessness The Unnatural 0 Hard 1 Hard 0 Hard 0 Hard 1 Hard 1 Failed 0
Failed 0 Failed 0 Failed 1 Failed

Madness Meter

Violence Unnatural Helplessness Isolation Self

0 Hard 1 Hard 0 Hard 0 Hard 1 Hard
1 Failed 0 Failed 0 Failed 0 Failed 1 Failed

Equipment

Limo, pepper spray, copy of the *Fortean Times*, several disposable cameras, Dictaphone

The Mapinguari

Pungent Monster of the Amazon

by Jason Morningstar

The Legend

In the sleepy river towns they call the thing mapinguari, but it has many names. The Canamari Indians say it is what remains of an evil shaman, punished by the gods for his arrogance and cruelty. Wide-eyed Brazilian rubber tappers swear they have seen men killed by the creature, their skulls cracked like eggs and brains sucked out. The hunters who work in the Tabajos basin speak of the monster in hushed tones, offering compelling details: it has a third eye in its chest, they say. Backward-facing feet. The head of a monkey. It travels with the white-lipped peccaries.

While many details vary, those who have encountered it agree on a few things. It is huge, for one, leaving colossal tracks unlike anything in the forest. It is covered with shaggy red hair, and has a soul-chilling, human-like cry. But above all, it stinks.

The mapinguari's stench is a palpable thing, nauseating at a great distance, something like commingled garlic, excrement, and rotting meat. The creatures are often described as being followed by clouds of flies. Strong men have been forced to flee from the odor of the monster alone, and others have found themselves dazed and sick for days after an encounter.

The Truth

While the tales are exciting (and an enterprising GM might decide that a few are not just imaginary embellishments), the truth is more prosaic. The mapinguari are Mylodons, giant ground sloths that, according to science, died off ten thousand years ago. An isolated population that survived global climate change and human predation is about to meet the twenty-first century headlong.

The mapinguari are nocturnal herbivores that prefer the relatively dry highlands to the marshy flood plain. Limited by nutritional dependence on plants found only in the Tabajos river basin, a 4,400 square mile area, they number perhaps 25 breeding pairs.. Human encroachment into their territory has escalated in recent years, and the mapinguari no longer have anywhere to hide. They are stressed and increasingly desperate. It is only a matter of time before they are discovered by science, for good or ill.

A male mapinguari stands over six feet high at the shoulder and weighs in excess of 400 pounds; the female is slightly smaller. They are indeed covered with shaggy, reddish-brown hair, and exude a potent stench from a stomach gland. Mapinguari are quite different from their distant cousins the tree sloths. They cannot climb, but they are quick, agile, and stealthy on the ground. They are also immensely strong -- one sign of their presence are trees that have been torn in half to gain access to the sap. They communicate with piercing cries that are startlingly human-like.

Although lacking keen eyesight and smell, the creatures have outstanding hearing, since the jaguar is a natural predator. In addition, mapinguari are excellent at stealthy movement (although their stench will alert anyone with a sense of smell to their general presence). They are shy, reclusive animals adept at avoiding contact in their forest homes.

Stalking the Giant Ground Sloth

Finding a mapinguari will be next to impossible under ordinary circumstances. Native Canamari hunters will have the

best chances, but these men will be reluctant to pursue an animal they view as either a deadly monster or evil spirit. They may even interfere with efforts to hunt the animals. Brazilian hunters and rubber tappers could be enlisted if the price was right, but there is no guarantee they will consider the job anything but a tourist excursion, and those who have seen the *bicho* (Portuguese for "beast") are unlikely to crave further contact. Knowledge of the area will help in the hunt, and tracking and naturalist skills are essential. Mappinguari are clever enough to avoid most simple traps, and are far too large to be caught in those set for other rainforest animals.

The lumbering creatures are not fighters, and will make every effort to avoid a confrontation. If they cannot escape, or must protect their young, they will lash out with their thick arms. The mappinguari's crude, backward-facing claws cannot be used to cut, but the paws are still dangerous weapons. Treat them as fists, with a small damage bonus due to the hard claws. The combination of fur and tough hide gives them some natural armor, but their reputation as bulletproof is, sadly, untrue.

Adventure Seeds

- Finding and capturing a mappinguari would effectively halt logging that threatens the Tabajos river basin. While this is good news for the ecosystem, it is exceedingly bad news for the forest products conglomerates. An expedition to find a living Mylodon will be carefully observed by certain parties, and steps may be taken to see that it does not succeed . . .
- Thomas Jefferson, a hopeful amateur paleontologist, urged Lewis and Clark to look for Mylodons on their journey to the Pacific Northwest. What if they had found some? In a Wild West setting, the peaceful animals could attract the attention of everyone from steampunk adventurers to Buffalo Bill Cody.
- Perhaps the Canamari are right -- the mappinguari *are* magical beings. Their powerful reek could be some combination of Odor, Panic, and Daze spells or an adaptation of the venom advantage. Are they guardians of some sacred site? What are they protecting? Are they, as legend insists, evil sorcerers? If so, what other powers might they have, and what do they want?
- What if the mappinguari are just *babies*? Perhaps, in the remotest corner of the Amazon, there are living Megatherium -- truly enormous ground sloths, 18-20 feet long and weighing up to four tons. These animals would behave far differently from their tiny offspring. Perhaps they are fiercely territorial and dangerously aggressive. But a dozen zoos are willing to pay any price for a live pair, and the race is on . . .
- Fur and other genetic material from long-dead Mylodons exists, and has even been mistaken as proof that they never died out. What if a twisted genius sought to recreate the giant ground sloth, either as part of an elaborate hoax or to modify them for his own purposes? When an army of chaingun-toting sloths holds the Brazilian parliament hostage and starts issuing demands, it is up to the PC's to sort things out . . .

GURPS Stats for the Mappinguari

ST 18, DX 10, IQ 6, HT 14.

Advantages: Acute Hearing +6; Alertness +3; Damage Resistance (DR1); Danger Sense; Light Fur (DR1); Penetrating Call.

Disadvantages: Appearance (Monstrous; Surrounded by dung flies); Bad Smell; Bestial; Cannot Climb; Delicate Metabolism; Edgy; Frightens Animals; No Fine Manipulators; Phobia (water, mild); Reputation (Among rainforest inhabitants, -3); Semi-upright; Shyness (Severe, -3).

Skills: Area Knowledge (Tabajos river basin)-13; Brawling-12; Camouflage-15; Lifting-19; Stealth-13; Survival (Rainforest)-13.

The mappinguari attacks with fists, with a 1 point damage bonus due to the hard claws. The combination of fur and tough hide gives them a DR of 2.

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Pyramid Review

Scarred Lands Gazetteer: Ghelspad

Published by [Sword & Sorcery Studios](#)



Written by Stephen and Stewart Wieck

48 pages; \$8.95

I would have assumed that this would be a [Necromancer Games](#) production, because it fits the slogan of that company ("Third Edition rules, First Edition feel") perfectly.

Because if this book had been bigger, and come in a boxed set with another map and some transparent overlays (and had a more "fantasy middle ages Europe" feel), it could have been *Greyhawk*.

This is not necessarily meant in a good way (I was never a huge fan of the *Greyhawk* setting in my youth). It is an interesting look at the continent of Ghelspad, filling in the setting that's been dribbling out of Sword & Sorcery games in their *d20* supplements. But it's not quite as complete and fleshed out a setting as has come to be the standard.

It's presented as a series of in-character documents, including a Vigilant newsletter (the Vigilants are a Prestige Class from *Relics and Rituals* that's much more interesting in context. They're a group of magic spies . . . a fantasy MI-6 of sorts), an intelligence report to King Virduk (the setting bad guy), and an update to the Incarnates.

It's slightly jarring to read; it seems like every power group in Ghelspad has a monthly newsletter, but the in-character format is somewhat de rigeur at this point, so it can hardly be complained about. It isn't done badly by any means, and it makes perfect sense for the Vigilants to be keeping each other up to date on this stuff.

The flaw with this game is that, like my youthful experiences with *Greyhawk*, the level of detail was fairly small. Ghelspad is a fascinating place, but if you want to run a game in it, you'll need to do a fair bit of work. It also seems to be on the cusp of monumental things happening (the tyrant is ill, his wife is a schemer, etc).

This is normally a very good thing. Unfortunately, I can only imagine that, Sword & Sorcery being a part of White Wolf, there will be no small amount of metaplot running through the game books and expanding with new supplements. If this is the case, it will likely cause no small amount of consternation; no plot line, it's said, has ever survived contact with the players. They will likely be shredded by running into legions of DMs.

Of course, it's possible that that's a false extrapolation on my part, and all supplements to be released will be set around the date. The setting's "momentous events are on the horizon" atmosphere sounds like it would be fun to play,

The book is not listed as a *d20* sourcebook, which makes sense, as it doesn't have any rules material. For another company, it may have made it slip under the radar of some players or retailers, but with White Wolf publishing and marketing it, it shouldn't have any problems.

The world is described in terms of nations, locations, organizations, and the gods of Ghelspad (which are already familiar if you've read the *Creature Compendium* or *Relics & Rituals*).

The nations are a good mix, with a number of good guys (including a non-evil city-state of Necromancers) and bad, including Calastia, the expansionistic state that has conquered a number of its neighbors. Conspicuous in their absence are population numbers for the various cities and nations. Some more scholarly info, such as trade production and

economic information might have also been useful.

The locations are an interesting bunch. Strange, arcane locales have always been an important part of game settings for me. The Vale of the Mage from *Greyhawk*, The Battle of Bones from the *Forgotten Realms*, and France from *Torg* have always struck me as enchanting in their strangeness. Ghelspad has an assortment of such places. Many of them owe their existence to the Godwar which shaped the continent; there are seas of blood, poisoned by sleeping titans, and forests inhabited by foul titanspawn. One difficulty is that the map included with the book lacks any sort of coordinates. When familiarizing themselves with the product, new players and GMs will find themselves scanning through the map to locate places that interest them.

The organizations section is interesting. It presents several organizations, including the Vigils of Vesh (Ghelspad's superspies for good) and the Incarnates, who are kung fu druids. It all wraps up with a retelling of the gods of Ghelspad, an interesting bunch that fulfill the theistic requirements. They definitely don't come across as having been pasted together out of a bunch of convenient and fun deities.

The setting is an interesting one, giving a standard fantasy setting with a nice post-apocalyptic feel without the pervasive devastation that such settings tend to possess (*Dark Sun*, for example). The book isn't perfect. The illustrations don't seem comperable to, say, parent company White Wolf's regular standards, and the book could really use an index. There are some references made that don't seem to refer to anything else (Duke Traviak and his Black Dragoons are mentioned once, but no info is ever given on them again).

The book's largest flaw is the lack of any concrete data. None of the nations or cities have population numbers listed with them, although they do have population breakdowns. There's no discussion of, say, army sizes or trade goods. The cultures, upon examination, seem somewhat ill-defined and vague. And there's no calendar in the book, which is always a useful addition. I'm glad the map (a nice one, for sure) has a scale on it, but it has no legend. How tall *are* those mountains? Why are some forests dark green, and others lighter?

I can see why Sword & Sorcery wouldn't want to make the *Ghelspad Gazetteer* a major production on the level of, say, the new *Forgotten Realms* Hardcover. The *Creature Collection* and *Relics & Rituals* both succeeded on their own merits, and Ghelspad's setting was a nice addition, but nominal at best. I imagine there was really no way to gauge the market strength of Ghelspad without releasing a supplement such as this one.

The misfortune is that Ghelspad has been released in dubs & drabs. We've seen monsters and magical goods, but these 48 pages don't come close to giving the detail I want for the setting. Maybe they'll release Ghelspad as a full-sized setting, because while the *Gazetteer* has interesting ideas, they currently don't have the substance to rest on.

--Justin Mohareb

Pyramid Review

Supermegatopia: The Roleplaying Game

Published by [Nightshift Games](#)



Created by **The Brothers Grinn (Brian & Stuart Burke)**

48 pages; \$9.95

Supermegatopia is the latest release from Nightshift games and is based upon a slightly controversial [web site](#) by the same name. Nightshift games have never been a company to shy away from innovative ideas or possible controversy; this game pushes the boundaries of taste and playability, but seems to work.

Like the *UNsanctioned* game also published by Nightshift, *Supermegatopia* uses the Paradigm Shift rules set. Characters are given three main stats: Mind, Body, and Agility. Skills add points to one of these basic stats to give a value that is rolled on a d20. Roll that number or above and you succeed. In addition to skills, characters may purchase talents, which enhance natural skills and abilities, which are essentially super powers. Character generation is quick and relatively balanced. Combat is likewise fast and easy to run; though this is not surprising considering Paradigm Shift is a proven and true system. The book ends with a short, two-page, tongue-in-cheek adventure that is reminiscent of R. Talasorian's *Teenagers from Outer Space*. *Supermegatopia* is definitely designed for fast, "anything can and does happen" roleplaying.

Only 10 pages of the 48-page book are devoted to the game system. The system is more than adequate for the source material, and written in a concise (though irreverent) manner. d10s for initiative, 2d10s for skill rolls, with 2 as an automatic success and 20 as an automatic failure. Damage is rolled on d10s with accuracy modifiers, while armor provides a protection value that is subtracted from damage. Attacks are conducted with 2d10 plus or minus modifiers. Every character has a base THR (To Hit Roll) of 10. There is nothing here that hasn't been seen before in one a hundred other games. Experienced gamers will absorb the game system in just a few minutes, while new gamers should pick it up almost as easily. There might not be rules for every situation or permutation of every superpower, but this isn't *Champions* and makes no claims to simulate that level of "realism." Frankly, the game doesn't need it. As game systems go this one is pretty transparent, and far less distracting than most super heroic RPGs.

Much of the book consists of source material, disguised as a furry animal comic book. The game revolves around the city of Supermegatopia: a city overrun with superheroes, called rats with capes and Kiwis. The city is home to many heroes and villains, including the Goalie, The Justice Legion of Supermegatopia, Weasel Boy, and Dark Chipmunk. Each hero and villains is a tongue in cheek send up of conventional heroes & villains with a furry animal twist. Superman becomes the Mighty Might Hampster and Weasel boy assumes the position of Batman. Each protects the city in their own way but always as the comic heroes.

You might think that a furry animal book would be little more than a simple punfest and filled with childish jokes. Well, this isn't your average anthropomorphic animal book, and it isn't *Albedo* or *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* by any stretch of the imagination. It's much deeper and much racier. There are hints of frontal nudity in the art and typical good girl costumes that leave little to the imagination. Characters insinuate acts that would make Mickey & Donald blush, but which are relatively tame compared to the content of the website. Crushed Kitty is a good example of the racier content of the web. The ex-stripper Dark Chipmunk who did make it into the RPG, and the comic strip included in this book continually mentions exposing her chest. In the context of the strip the references are a commentary on scanty supervillian costumes and their effect on fanboys.

The comedy often focuses on gender jokes and bodily humor, often about nudity. While some of the humor might be

NC-13 (as the back of the book warns), the majority is accessible to anyone familiar comics or the comic genre in general. The Mighty Mighty Hamster is a homage to Superman, while the inspiration for Wonder Wombat is obvious, especially when you see the art. Marvel superheroes are also parodied especially with S.W.O.R.D. and its one eyed leader Colonel Furry, Dick Furry. The art complements this and is best compared to good girl art with a furry twist. Characters are well depicted, often with little left to the imagination, again prompting an NC-13 warning, but very well drawn. The Brothers Grinn know their subject well and are obviously skilled artists. Likewise the writers also know what they are doing here, and blend just the right amount of tongue-in-cheek comedy with superheroic action to make the game fun and playable, not an easy accomplishment for a comedic game.

The book is intended to be a funny take on funny book superheroes, not a gritty, realistic portrayal of a dark future where vigilantes maim jaywalkers. There are plenty of heroes and villains included to quick start a game, as well as a two-page adventure. If you like your action tongue-in-cheek and your furry babes hot, then *Supermegatopia* is for you. But you had better be over thirteen to read it.

--Andrew J. Lucas

Murphy's Rules



by John Kovalic

Murphy's Rules



Murphy's Rules



Previously, We -- Um -- Did Stuff?

At the beginning of each adventure, I tend to ask my players what happened the previous session. I like to game weekly, so that not too much time passes between adventures.

Let me tell you: There is nothing as uncomfortable as the wall of silence and blank stares that accompanies when they don't remember.

"Umm . . ." they'll stammer, trying to dredge up anything. They'll remember interesting things that occurred two and three adventures ago, with no recollection of the previous adventure.

After a couple of times, I pretty much started structuring all my adventures in ongoing campaigns around the idea of getting them to remember them the next time. I try to do this in a variety of ways: handouts, plot twists, dramatic scenes, cliffhangers, interesting dialogues, and so on. The trick (as I saw it) wasn't to make them remember the whole adventure; rather, by giving them one thing to spark their memories, I'd hopefully give them a building block to reconstruct the whole previous session. That was the plan, anyway.

After a while, I noticed something interesting. Different players remembered different things. I'd plan the memorable hook to be a shocking revelation regarding a noble; one player would remember the in-character banter regarding fashions while the other would remember the penultimate combat, where they rolled too well and killed the Number Two Bad Guy before he could deliver his mini-soliloquy. I'd leave them stranded on a planet with a damaged spaceship; they'd remember the (off-the-cuff) rumor about dramatic price fluctuations on a neighboring world, and the fact that their pet disappeared.

Of course, sometimes they would remember what I expected them to. But almost as often, they wouldn't.

And having tried to generate memory jumpstarts for a few years, I've reached some conclusions (in no particular order):

- I still try to make at least one memorable scene per adventure. I find that it personally gives me a focus to build towards in my sessions; without having something to build towards, I can let my plots meander a bit.
- Of course, if the players go off the beaten path, I don't shoehorn them back onto track; nothing destroys the atmosphere more than using a cattle prod on your PCs (unless you're playing *Battle Cattle*, that is . . .).
- I also like having something physical to hand the players. Unfortunately, time constraints mean I usually *don't*, but having a map, character notes, a news item, or anything they can keep in a binder means they have a better shot of remembering. And it adds to the stack of information I can draw on in future adventures . . .
- Players will, collectively, remember different things than I intended. Sometimes scenes I planned as trivial (or didn't plan at all) will evolve into meaningful, important scenes. These unexpected developments are good, in my opinion, and are one of the reasons I love to roleplay. (Trivial aside: In *Raiders of the Lost Ark* [aka *Indiana Jones and the Saturday Night Fever*], the scene where Indy shoots the swordsman was unplanned; it was originally intended to be another extended combat. Harrison Ford was suffering from diarrhea that day and, in frustration, drew his gun and shot. Everyone loved it so much they left it in the movie. Personally, I think it's one of the most memorable scenes in the movie.)
- Players will, individually, remember different things than I intended. This should be expected, but can still be surprising. "We learned the King has a bastard daughter!" "Really? When?" Kind GMs can use this fact to deliver information to the player (or players) who will appreciate it; if only one player cares about the intrigues of the royal bloodline, why not let him intercept the letter detailing a court secret? Evil GMs will use this fact to give important clues to the character that won't remember. ("The Avatar of destruction must have a weakness! If only we knew!" "Wait . . . I remember this old guy talking. I think it was a prophecy . . . um . . .") Chaotic Neutral GMs will roll popcorn for initiative, invite ferrets into the gaming group, and play Steve Reich's *Piano Phase* as combat music.
- Finally, if your players don't remember previous sessions *too* often, it might be a sign that there's a problem. You may want to have a chat with your players and see what might be more memorable for them. (I feel like

this is where the *Cosmo* quiz would go . . . "Are You And Your Gaming Group Compatible?")

* * *

Well, it's summer con season again, and that means a few things regarding *Pyramid*.

First, Origins is this week; as such, Ken Hite's column is taking the week off. With any luck he'll be back next week. In the meantime, hopefully the oddness of a stinky slug will satisfy your weekly recommended dosage of Vitamin Weird.

Second, John's going to be Con mode through August, roaming from town to town like Kane in *Kung Fu* . . . only with a bit more autograph signing and a smidgen less butt kicking.

Finally, *Pyramid* needs to find itself a mysterious wealthy benefactor to send me to conventions. It doesn't even matter if it's ultimately revealed that you're an evil mastermind with a plan for world domination . . . just so long as I get to GenCon! <grin>

* * *

Since I haven't mentioned it in a while, please feel free to drop me a line in any of the myriad of ways available. I often hang out in the [chat room](#), I always read the Pyramid board on the [discussion group](#), and you can always drop me an email at pyramid@sjgames.com.

--Steven Marsh

* * *

*Last week's answer: **Vyllage-on-the-Cheep** Sample Set #2: The Vyllage Junkman. (Available as a free download from [MicroTactix's site.](#))*

(Five stars)

"IT'S LOOSE!!!!!!"

"Lab, this is command. **WHAT'S** loose?"

"It broke out of the Lab! It killed Jones!"

"What is it? **WHAT** killed Jones?"

"I don't know, but it's headed your way!"



by John G. Wood

At the heart of the Discworld stands the ten-mile-high spire of Cori Celesti, home of the gods -- or at least all the gods that count. It is an inhospitable place for mortals; even if you manage to find somewhere to stand in the icy, near-vertical terrain you are likely to be frozen, electrified by the Aurora Corialis and buried in snow before being knocked off the peak by lightning bolts casually dropped from Dunmanifestin. The laws of narrative causality being what they are, you will then land within the wall of mountains keeping the Ice Giants prisoner at the foot the spire, disturbing their afternoon nap.

Move a little further away from Cori Celesti and life becomes more tolerable. Maybe it's the same thaumic flux that causes the Aurora; maybe it's the high mountain air; maybe it's the fact that the only alternative employment in the region is yok herding. Whatever the reason, there are more monasteries per square mile here than anywhere else on the Disc.

Of course, with dwarfs, trolls, humans, gods, and religion in close proximity it's not all serenity and contemplation . . .

*(Author's note: Like the campaign settings in **GURPS Discworld Also**, this article is not "canon." Although I have tried to make it consistent with previously published material, future chronicles may contradict it. You Have Been Warned.)*

Geography

Most trade into the region comes via the great river whose valley reaches almost to the Hub. According to Sir Richard de Camp of the Royal Ankh-Morpork Geographical Society, this is the Smarl -- the longest river on the Disc -- whose source he discovered on one of his many expeditions. The river forks, however, and to the celebrated Genuan explorer Antoine Seraglio it is the Vieux, the longest (and fattest) river, whose source he discovered. The locals have their own name for it, of course; most civilized people consider this irrelevant.

The great river valley divides the Hublands. Turnwise lie the Ramtops, stretching from the foothills of Cori Celesti almost to the Rim; Widdershins the sharp, high mountains blend into the Trollbones and gradually soften to form the Hubland Steppes, home of horse people and barbarian heroes. On the counterweight side the glaciers rule, making their way slowly to the sea where the great isthmus joins the continent.

The disc is thicker at the Hub than elsewhere, allegedly to make space for an internal layer of molten rock but more likely because there are no elephants underneath to stop it sagging. Vast quantities of octiron, gold and other important ores make the region an attractive prospect for dwarfs. Unfortunately there are also a lot of trolls, many of them igneous (or as humans would say, "well hard").

The People

Trolls

Trolls have been in the region longer than any other mortal race. Indeed, many people think that the mountains formed from the bodies of ancient trolls who settled down thousands of years ago and never woke. The Hub is ideal territory for them -- cold, mountainous and largely uninhabited. Because of the temperature they are, on average, no less intelligent than their human or dwarf neighbors.

Hubland troll society is stratified, and dominated by the old. As trolls age they tend to become more contemplative and move further up the mountains; there is intense competition for the highest, most exposed places, where an elder can keep his or her brain in peak conditions (the decision process involves candidates philosophically hitting each other with rocks). Because there is little room at the top, true sages tend to be loners. Acolytes group together in the troll equivalent of monasteries further down the mountain and send depositions in search of wisdom.

Younger trolls sometimes rebel. Most of these simply head for the plains, hoping for a life of freedom and the opportunity to reach the top of a smaller heap. Some, blessed with the appropriate coloration, become Yeti instead (see p. DW71).

Dwarfs

Dwarfs have been in the mountains almost as long as the trolls. The mines here are very traditional; Uberwald is regarded as too permissive by many. The rich veins of ore here have been so heavily mined that kingdoms are frequently breaking through into each other's tunnels, usually leading to some good-natured fighting over the territory.

Dwarfen literal-mindedness does not encourage philosophical contemplation -- mention a tree falling in the forest and they are likely to calculate how many pit props they currently need -- and they run very few monasteries. However, since they take things so seriously many dwarf societies have almost religious levels of ritual and discipline. The Battle Orders are the best known examples but there are many others, including societies concentrating on armory, engineering, subterranean cartography, and woodwork.

Humans

Existence here is harder for humans than for dwarfs or trolls but there are still many isolated human villages nestled in glacier-carved valleys, eking a living from land the typical Lancre peasant would describe as "bare rock." The life of a monk can seem pretty cushy to the inhabitants (especially in those villages which have to supply the food for their local monastery). As a result humans make up the bulk of the religious population.

Humans in the mountains are generally shorter than on the plains. Academics blame this on the lack of meat in their diet while country folk look disapproving and observe that "you know what they say about dwarfs." The locals are silent but it must be admitted that many of the women do have remarkably hairy chins.

Not-Yeti

Some explorers trapped outside in blizzards on the mountains caught glimpses of hairy humanoids shambling through the snow. Others found footprints vaguely resembling large, unshod human feet. When asked if these were the infamous mountain trolls, locals replied "no, not yeti" and a legend was born.

So many expeditions have failed to find and capture the not-yeti that they are considered a myth by most civilized people. However, they do exist; their closest relatives are found on the tropical island of Bhangbhangduc (or, in one case, in the library of Unseen University). They keep to themselves, so nobody knows how they feel about the climate and the lack of bananas.

Religion

Many orders have already been described in the chronicles, including the Balancing Monks, History Monks, Listening Monks, Yen Buddhists, and the Monks of Cool (possibly the authors of the Book of Going Forth Around Elevenish).

The only monks with headquarters reported outside the Hublands are the followers of the Way of Mrs. Cosmopolite; even they come from the mountains.

While some temples to the gods of Dunmanifestin exist in the region, opinion is divided over whether it is a good idea to attract their attention -- many monasteries are instead dedicated to the mental and physical improvement of their members, studiously ignoring the neighborhood deities. There are also small gods in the mountains (although not so many as in the desert), and a lucky few find worshippers to found a temple in their honor. Other orders are dedicated to an Idea which has seeped through from another reality thanks to the thaumic flux.

The upshot of this is that the GM can introduce a monastery built around almost any theme, although to keep things consistent it should be given a Himalayan slant. The Wanderer's Monastery Table can be used to flesh out some of the details.

Sample Monasteries

The New World Monks

A plains man now known simply as Leader became convinced that the Apocalypse was close at hand, and that the only place which would be safe was the Hub, since the Ice Giants were going to be leaving there to conquer the rest of the world. Leader formed a cult and led his chosen people into the mountains to prepare for The Day, creating a heavily-fortified temple stocked with long-lasting food as well as the weapons essential for keeping out those who weren't chosen. A network of abandoned dwarf tunnels beneath the building acted as an emergency glacier-proof shelter.

The New World monks are men, women and children of all ages -- families are encouraged to join as a group since their order will soon be repopulating the Disc. The outer circle members spend most of their time on the plains, leading ordinary lives, gathering supplies, recruiting new members, and trusting that there will be enough warning to get to the mountains before the end of the world. The inner circle devote themselves to the rituals of survivalism, checking and double-checking their weapons, reciting contingency plans, patrolling, and maintaining their temple ("The Compound") in perfect working order. They are dedicated men and women with short hair and multicolored robes (usually patchy green and brown) who regard anyone approaching their home with suspicion -- wanderers are likely to find themselves facing the wrong end of a loaded crossbow.

For more information see chapter 5 of *GURPS Y2K*. If the Apocalypse arrives, consider chapter 10 . . .

The Society for Crisnassen Cookery

Harri Crisnassen was one of the greatest dwarf chefs ever, able to do things to a rat or vermine that would make anyone's mouth (and eyes) water. He would also shave his head and beard "for hygiene's sake"; some of the younger, more impressionable dwarfs saw this behavior as a sign of his wisdom and became his disciples. Dressing in saffron aprons to protect their armor from fat stains, they learned his secret recipes and determined to spread his brand of Low Cuisine throughout the Disc.

There is now a branch of the Society in many traditional dwarf communities but the biggest growth has been in cities like Ankh-Morpork. The disciples are aggressive in marketing "Harri Crisnassen's World Famous Fried Rat," accosting people at docks, bars and mine entrances to press menus into their hands. Most people take the pamphlet just to get away.

The Society is not speciesist and has started catering for humans and trolls. There have even been some experiments blending cooking styles but these have been less successful -- the "chip butty" (small pieces of rock between two slices of buttered dwarf bread) was much admired but didn't sell.

Most dwarfs are only interested in tunnels as a means of getting at promising seams. The Society is concerned about

communication and the rapid transmission of recipes, orders, and ingredients; as a result it now runs the biggest network of tunnels under the Disc. People unused to bald, beardless dwarfs saw small, saffron-clad individuals appearing from holes in the ground and concocted a theory about Secret Masters running the world from their mountain fastness via the tunnels. Coincidentally, the top rank of the Crisnassen's, the dwarfs at the Hub entrusted with the secret recipes, are known as the secret masters, but they don't run the world. Yet.

Wanderers' Monastery Table

When stumbling into a new monastery, roll 2d for each of the following:

Eligibility

- 2-6 Male humans
- 7 Female humans
- 8 Any humans
- 9 No restrictions
- 10 Trolls
- 11 Dwarfs
- 12 Other (not-yeti, undead)

Costume

- 2-3 No rule
- 4 Armor
- 5 Black robes
- 6 White robes
- 7-8 Saffron robes
- 9 Other single-color robes
- 10 Multicolor robes
- 11 Nudity
- 12 Other (furs, Hawaiian shirts)

Hair

(ignore for trolls, add 2 for dwarfs)

- 2-5 Shaven
- 6 Tonsure
- 7 Other specific style (mohawk, dreadlocks)
- 8-10 Never cut
- 11+ No rule

Disciplines of Faith

- 2-3 None
- 4-5 Trivial (-1 point)
- 6-7 Minor (-5 points)

- 8-10 Major (-10 points)
- 11-12 Great (-15 points)

Size

(subtract 2 for trolls)

- 4 Tiny (<10)
- 5-6 Small (10-25)
- 7-8 Medium (25-50)
- 9-10 Large (50-100)
- 11-12 Immense (100+)

Hierarchy

(modifiers: Tiny -2, Small -1, Large +1, Immense +2)

- 4 Shared responsibility
- 5-6 Single leader
- 7-8 Small leading group
- 9-10 Simple hierarchy
- 11+ Complex hierarchy

Attitude to Violence

- 2-4 Total Non-Violence (-30 points)
- 5-6 Self-Defense Only (-15 points)
- 7-8 Cannot Kill (-15 points)
- 9-11 Use when appropriate
- 12 Violence cleanses the soul

Attitude to Outsiders

- 2 Locals banned
- 3-6 Everyone welcome
- 7-8 Foreigners must prove themselves
- 9-11 Local people only
- 12 None may enter

Special Abilities

- 2-6 None
- 7-8 Martial Art (varies)
- 9 Longevity (5 points)
- 10 Cloud men's minds (Daze knack, 2 power, 40 points)
- 11 Mind men's clouds (Clouds knack, 6 points)
- 12 Roll twice

Scenario Ideas

Because It's There

It began when Dirk d'Astard, black sheep of the Royal Ankh-Morpork Geographical Society, insulted earnest explorer Sir Edmund de Camp. It became a competition to see who could climb the greatest number of unconquered peaks by winter. Both men planned carefully; Edmund worked on husbanding his resources and cutting time between peaks, whilst Dirk considered ways to nobble his rival. Both assembled teams of bearers, picture box operators, medics, guards, translators, and all the other people needed for a major expedition, Dirk managing to slip some troublemakers into Edmund's party. The rivals were to meet the judges back at the Society on the night before Hogswatch, or forfeit the bet.

The race was on.

Characters

Sir Edmund de Camp

ST 11 [10], **DX** 12 [20], **IQ** 10 [-], **HT** 12 [20]

Speed 6, Move 6, Dodge 6

Advantages: Absolute Direction [5]; Fit [5]; Full Literacy [5]; Status 3 [10]; Wealthy [20].

Disadvantages: Enemy (rivals, 6 or less) [-5]; Glory Hound [-15]; No Sense of Humor [-10]; Obsession (prove himself as a great explorer) [-10].

Quirks: Loves a challenge; Proud.

Skills: Acrobatics-12 [4]; Area Knowledge (Ankh-Morpork)-9 [1/2]; Climbing-13 [4]; Heraldry-10 [1]; Hiking-13 [4]; Leadership-13 [8]; Riding (horse)-10 [1/2]; Shortsword-10 [1/2]; Shouting at Foreigners-9 [2]; Swimming-11 [1/2].

Languages: Ankhian-10 [0].

Edmund has always lived in the shadow of his famous uncle, Sir Richard de Camp, for whom he feels a mixture of pride and resentment. He is determined that some day he will be recognized as a great explorer in his own right rather than "Sir Richard's nephew." During the competition he intends to test his mettle by climbing the second highest mountain on the Disk, at grid reference K2.

Edmund concentrates on keeping himself in trim, rather than developing the skills he really needs. However, he has a knack for picking good hirelings and so far they have prevented his expeditions from failing, despite their employer's efforts to do everything himself. Edmund is regarded as a humorless bore by his fellows.

Dirk d'Astard

ST 10 [-], **DX** 11 [10], **IQ** 13 [30], **HT** 10 [-]

Speed 5.25, Move 5, Dodge 5

Advantages: Ally Group (hangers-on) [10]; Danger Sense [15]; Full Literacy [5]; Status 2 [5]; Wealthy [20].

Disadvantages: Compulsive Behavior (cheating) [-10]; Cowardice [-10]; Reputation (a cheat and a liar, -1) [-5]; Self-Centered [-10]; Unattractive [-5].

Quirks: Always follows the most complicated plans; Dislikes heights; Twirls moustache when nervous.

Skills: Area Knowledge (Ankh-Morpork)-13 [1]; Bard-12 [1/2]; Brawling-11 [1]; Carousing-11 [3 1/2]; Disguise-12 [1]; Fast-Talk-15 [4]; Gambling-12 [1]; Leadership-13 [2]; Lockpicking-12 [1]; Shadowing-12 [1]; Traps-14 [4].

Languages: Ankhian-13 [0].

Dirk is seen as a witty party animal by some of his contemporaries and as a disgrace to his class by most other nobles. Although highly intelligent he frequently gets himself into trouble by cheating, even when it would be easier to win honestly. Being a city man with little outdoor experience, he knows that his only chance of beating Edmund is to stop him getting home for Hogswatch. Dirk will have to climb some minor peaks to prove he was trying, and is not looking forward to it.

Involving the PCs

Ankh-Morpork-based PCs can be employed by either team (or, in the case of d'Astard's "moles", by both). The GM should decide the route taken by the teams - either by riverboat up the Smarl or by land to Lancre and then into the High Ramtops.

PCs at the Hub can take time off from their regular activities to help the visitors (people who do this are known as shirkas). Mountain survival skills are particularly useful for getting foreigners out of trouble.

"Monk, eh?"

The senior priests at the Great Temple of Buna asked themselves, how do you solve a problem like Trickiparka? The young, talented and devoted acolyte had joined the celibate, all-male monastery as a child and somehow managed to hide the fact that she was female -- until her teens. As she grew into a young woman other monks found their concentration faltering and it looked as if she would have to be expelled, for everyone else's sake. Then a message arrived from the god himself, hand-delivered by a not-yeti, saying that it was time to expand. A monk was to set out with a copy of the scriptures for the lands beyond the mountains and spread the word of Buna. Trickiparka was sent and life in the temple returned to normal.

Characters

Trickiparka

ST 10 [-], **DX** 10 [-], **IQ** 13 [30], **HT** 11 [10]

Speed 6, Move 6, Dodge 6

Advantages: Attractive [5]; Clerical Investment (Rank 1) [10]; Fearlessness +1 [2]; Fully Literate [5]; Imperturbable [10]; Manual Dexterity +1 [3]; Musical Ability +1 [2]; Patron (Buna) [25]; Single-Minded [5].

Disadvantages: Disciplines of Faith (Bunaism) [-10]; Duty (to Temple) [-10]; Oblivious [-3]; Pacifism (Self-defense only) [-15]; Youth [-2].

Quirks: Believes totally in her god; Speaks carefully and precisely; Staid.

Skills: Area Knowledge (Temple and Valley)-11 [1/2]; Bard-13 [4]; Calligraphy-12 [4]; Dancing (temple)-11 [4]; Law (Religious)-11 [1]; Meditation-12 [4]; Performance/Ritual-15 [8]; Singing-15 [4]; Theology-14 [6].

Languages: Ankhian-11 [1/2]; Gesture-14 [2]; Hublander-13 [0].

Trickiparka's parents raised her as a boy and sent her to the local temple for financial reasons, but the decision suited her well. She is puzzled by her selection for this important mission, feeling she still has too much to learn, but obeys the will of Buna. She misses the temple and is determined to keep up standards while away.

Bunaist practice requires her to spend several hours a day in meditation, to eat only vegetables and to follow strict rituals. She also spends a lot of her "free" time studying, leaving only two or three hours a day for travel.

Buna

ST 18 [50], **DX** 13 [30], **IQ** 9 [-10], **HT** 10/15 [25]

Speed 5.75, Move 4, Dodge 5

Advantages: Ally (Trickiparka, 15-) [5]; Ally Group (worshippers, medium group, 6-) [10]; Brachiator [5]; Double Jointed [5]; Enhanced Move (brachiating) [10]; Lightning Knack [16]; Long Arms [20]; Recognized Divinity [5]; Toughness +2 [25]; Two extra short arms (prehensile feet) [10]; Unaging [15]; Very Rapid Healing [15].

Psionic Powers: Telepathy power 8 (everyone)/16 (worshippers only) [60].

Disadvantages: Bad Temper [-10]; Bowlegged [-1]; Dependency (worship) [-10]; Hidebound [-10]; Mute [-25]; Overconfidence [-10]; Poor Grip [-5]; Reduced Move (running) [-5]; Self-Centered [-10]; Semi-Upright [-5]; Stubbornness [-5]; Unattractive [-5].

Quirks: Deliberately provokes people he doesn't like.

Psionic Skills: Emotion Sense-12 [10]; Telereceive-10 [6]; Telesend-10 [6].

Other Skills: Acrobatics-14 [8]; Area Knowledge (Hublands)-8 [1/2]; Brawling-14 [2]; Gesture-11 [1/2]; Intimidation-13 [6]; Staff-13 [4]; Survival (mountains)-8 [1].

Languages: Ankhian-7 [1/2]; Hublander-7 [1/2]; Orangutan-9 [-].

Buna knows the story of Om's rise to glory from his humble incarnation as a tortoise worshipped by a lone disciple. With several believers and a much more flexible body Buna is convinced that he can do even better. His temper and his inflated sense of his own abilities mean he often gets into fights. Trickiparka tries to rein him in (when she notices); as a god he ignores her.

Involving the PCs

For a confused quest campaign, the PCs could be companions Trickiparka and Buna pick up on their journey -- in a 100-point campaign one person could play the monk. Buna is a handy tool for the GM to get the party into trouble.

An established, relatively stationary PC group could encounter the pair attempting to "spread the word." Trickiparka is innocent, and socially inept; if she tries this in (say) Ankh-Morpork she is likely to need rescuing.

The Hall of the Mountain King

A mining team operating close to the base of Cori Celesti breaks through into a vast, abandoned complex of dwarf-made caverns and tunnels, equipped with some of the finest forges they have seen. The king believes this to be Sniffenheim, the ancient home of the dwarfs contracted to supply Blind Io's hammers. Of course, other mining teams are interested in the legendary veins of octiron rumored to be found in Sniffenheim. One secret order dedicated to the

preservation of the site wants to find out how the breach was made, get everyone out and seal it up again. They are even willing to resort to using outside agents . . .

A Ridge Too Far

Bored with the stability of life in the Agatean Empire, Emperor Cohen goes exploring. He discovers the tunnels leading from the Hunghung branch of Harri Crisnassen's. Usually his army won't venture beyond the wall for fear of the ghosts that lurk outside, but never before has the army been able to travel underground. Cohen decides to annex the Hub. The battle is more even than it seems. The Emperor has the manpower but can only send a few soldiers through the tunnels at a time. The dwarfs are definitely up for a fight, and the famous monastery of Shou Lin (which houses many Agatean refugees) acts as a rallying point for the martially inclined orders.

PCs can join in the fighting on either side, or help organize the evacuation of the resistance leaders.

The Rivals

A new monastery has opened up across the valley, and seems to be attracting acolytes at a rapid rate. Now monks are beginning to defect, breaking their existing vows. It's no longer a simple case of who is the serenest -- what is the secret of the new order? And how can they be stopped?

Rock of Ages

An ancient troll on one of the highest peaks has finally gone completely dormant and it is time to choose his successor. Unfortunately, he has left specific instructions spurning traditional methods -- the new sage must be the one who does the most to make the mountains safe for trolls in the next troll year. Ways to do this include attracting the patronage of a god, improving relations with dwarfs and humans, or wiping out the other races.

The Shade

A shadowy figure trained in Mysterious Mountain Ways has begun a vigilante campaign to clean up crime in the Shades of Ankh-Morpork -- by turning the perpetrators into messy red splotches. The Assassins' and Thieves' Guilds are up in arms; can the Watch (or other concerned citizens) stop the mystery killer before the body count hits triple figures? Will they have to go into the mountains to discover the source of his abilities?

Cool Aid

A group of society ladies in Ankh-Morpork hear about the poor living conditions of the Hubland people and organize a charity mission to save the benighted souls there, bringing decent food, proper religion and information on the correct way to farm. In their enthusiasm the ladies sweep up anyone too slow to get out of the way. Before they know it, the new recruits have a task, a uniform and are on their way to the hub.

Origins Awards Announced: Pyramid Wins Best Magazine

by Micah Jackson

Voted on by gaming industry veterans and average gamers alike, the [Origins Awards](#) are the highest honor in the hobby. Last night the annual awards were presented for the 27th time before a crowd of gaming's best and brightest. Dressed in a range of styles, from basic black tuxedo to basic black t-shirt, gaming's glitterati turned out to honor its own. Before the night was out, there would be some gasps of surprise, some well-fought battles, and some inevitable victories -- all things for which the adventure gaming hobby is justly famous.

Taking the reins of the show for the third time, [Cheapass Games](#) president James Earnest hosted with his usual quick wit and grace under pressure. A street juggler before he went into game design, he began with a feat of plate spinning that no other juggler performs. Staring into the bright spotlight, he performed another trick, that of guiding the crowd through the more than two-hour program, peppering the traditional award show language with one-liners.

All in all, the awards were surprisingly even this year. [Wizards of the Coast](#), riding the success of *Dungeons and Dragons 3e*, went home with the most Calliopes, four in all. Two other companies, however, were right on their heels. Cheapass Games and [Steve Jackson Games](#), both fan favorites, each earned three more Origins Awards to add to their extensive collections. [Looney Labs](#), makers of *Fluxx*, captured two of the awards, with a total of fifteen companies sharing the 23 awards.

Pyramid Magazine, after having been nominated many times over the years for Best Professional Gaming Periodical finally got its statuette. In the past it has lost to Hall of Fame inductee *Dragon Magazine* and more recently *Knights of the Dinner Table*. *Pyramid* was finally recognized as one of the gaming industry's premier voices, a fact its readers have known about since its inception. In accepting the award on behalf of the magazine, Suppressed Transmission Columnist Kenneth Hite said, "I'm just glad that a magazine I've been so proud to be a part of finally won something."

The biggest award of the night, Best Roleplaying Game, went to Wizards of the Coast's *Dungeons & Dragons 3e*, which surprised no one. This latest entry in the venerable franchise introduced the *d20 system* that, as an open system, ensured that fans would have plenty of supplementary material. Indeed, the winner of Best Roleplaying Adventure, *Death in Freeport* ([Green Ronin](#)), is a *d20* product. Steve Jackson Games took two other awards in the category, Best Roleplaying Supplement for *GURPS Steampunk* and Best Gaming Accessory for *The Munchkin's Guide to Powergaming*. The Academy recognized *D&D's Monster Manual* for Graphic Design.

Ever since the release of *Magic: The Gathering*, card gaming has become an increasingly important segment of gaming to fans and designers alike. This year the Calliope for Best Trading Card Game went to the *Sailor Moon Collectible Card Game* ([Dart Flipcards](#)). Best Traditional Card Game went home with Andy Looney from Looney Labs and his game *Chrononauts*. The Best Card Game Expansion or Supplement for 2000 was Cheapass Games' *Brawl: Club Foglio* according to the voters. Largely due to its Phil Foglio art, *Brawl: Club Foglio* walked away with a second award for Best Graphic Presentation.

Board Games were another category with a wide range of winners. *Axis and Allies: Europe* from industry giant [Avalon Hill](#) took the prize in the Best Historical Board Game category, while Cheapass Games wunderkind James Earnest picked up the statuette for *The Great Brain Robbery* as the Best Science Fiction or Fantasy Board Game. Looney Labs, a relative newcomer to the Origins Awards, walked away with the Calliope for Best Abstract Board Game for their entry -- *Icehouse: The Martian Chess Set*. John Tynes, a man known much more for his writing, won Best Graphic Design for his contribution, *The Hills Run Wild* ([Pagan Publishing](#)).

The Origins Awards were originally named for Avalon Hill founder Charles S. Roberts, so miniatures have been important to the Awards since the beginning. Riding the coattails of *Dungeons & Dragons 3e*, the best Science Fiction

or Fantasy Miniature went to The Beholder from Wizards of the Coast. **BattleTech** designer Jordan Weisman's new company [Wizkids](#) was honored by the Academy for its new collectible miniatures game, ***Mage Knight: Rebellion*** in the Science Fiction or Fantasy Miniatures Rules area. Shane Hensley of Pinnacle won in the Historical Rules category for ***Fields of Honor: The American War of Independence***.

Certain games and people are so influential to the gaming industry that they are honored by being inducted into the Adventure Gaming Hall of Fame. This year there were four new members -- two people and two games. For innovative world designs and lasting revolutions in the way people play RPGs, West End Games' ***Paranoia*** and White Wolf's ***Vampire: The Masquerade*** were justly included. World renowned German game designer Dr. Reiner Knizia earned his place in the Hall of Fame alongside fellow 2000 inductee Peter Adkison, the former President of Wizards of the Coast, who received a standing ovation as well as the coveted Calliope.

Last but certainly not least, beloved *Dork Tower* columnist John Kovalic accepted the Origins Award for Best Game Related Short work for "Matt and Gilly's Big Date" from *Dork Tower #11*. John, as always, was gracious in victory, thanking each of his fellow nominees by name.

With the awards distributed for another year, the Academy of Adventure Gaming Arts and Design headed out to reward itself with a festive reception. Soon they will be back and work doing what they do best -- representing the designers who make the best games of the year 2000, and every year.

Operation: Rabbit Chaos

By Alice Turov

"My family's wealth and resources are entirely at ARF's disposal, Dr. Jahn," said Francis, a rebellious teen who'd struggled to find his own voice. "**Hail anarchy!** How may I aid the cause?"

Dr. Jahn pulled out a gun and shot Francis in the head.

"You! Skull! Take Francis' resources and find out what's afoot with BILL."

"But my name's not . . ." Dr. Jahn waved the gun casually at the stammering man. "Yessir. Skull. BILL. Right. Hail anarchy. Gotta go."

Dr. Jon, President of the Business Institute for Longer Living, addressed his Chief Security Officer. "We have something big coming out of our Los Angeles office. Dr. Woo's research has finally reached fruition. We need to get it to San Francisco in two days for further development."

"That should be easy enough," said Skip. "Any complications?"

"One. ARF."

"Ah." Skip paused. "Does the company policy have nutbar insurance?"

"Operation: Rabbit Chaos" is a five-part scenario for *Car Wars*. Each part can be played individually (although part III will need to be improvised somewhat), or as part of a mini-campaign. A referee is not necessary, but can be useful.

Part I

Under the cover of night, BILL is attempting to bring the notes and samples to its research facilities in San Francisco. ARF believes it is in their best interests to intercept this super-secret cargo. As it turns out, they are correct.

For this scenario, each player designs one vehicle for \$15,000 or less. Place three clean sections of road down, however the BILL player desires. BILL places its vehicle down on the first section of road (wherever it wants), and declares its speed. ARF then places its vehicle down on the first section of road and declares its speed.

Play is as normal, except for placing new sections of road. Whenever both vehicles leave the last section of road, a new section is added. (It's dark and foggy, so visibility is limited to three road sections.) BILL has more accurate maps than ARF, and decides what style of road section is added and how it is oriented. ARF has its agents everywhere, however, ready to sabotage the highways at a moment's notice; as such, the ARF player decides whether or not the debris side is used.

BILL's object in this scenario is to kill the ARF vehicle, or escape. (BILL escapes by having three road sections between it and the ARF vehicle.) ARF's objective is to disable or destroy the BILL vehicle; the papers and samples therein are in a fireproof briefcase and can be retrieved easily. Neither player will know the others' vehicle design.

Part II

ARF may or may not acquire the notes. Regardless, BILL cannot allow those ARF agents to escape; they know too much.

This scenario begins with the ARF player constructing a contiguous 1350 square-foot base (six 15 square-foot

sections) where their current cell operations are stationed. The ARF player can also place up to 20 single-square debris counters on the map (no more than two adjacent to each other; there must be at least 15 feet between them). Each player has \$30,000 to design as many or as few cars as they would like.

The ARF vehicles start out stationary, placed wherever the ARF player wants. The BILL vehicles start out 225 feet away, moving whatever speeds that player chooses. The BILL player has 20 turns to get a vehicle driver to the base, inside it (doors are presumed to be available or easily made), outside it, and back off the map. One full turn must be spent inside the base . . . either to find and retrieve the plans, or to kill the cell leader. That driver must then make it 225 feet away from the base; ideally BILL will drive all of its vehicles more than 225 feet away from the base. After 20 turns ARF's reinforcements will have been alerted and return to base; any BILL vehicles still inside the 225 radius are presumed swarmed and destroyed by ARF members.

BILL wins if it gets a driver inside and outside the base -- and outside the edge of the map -- in 20 turns or less. ARF wins if it can repel all the BILL agents. Neither player knows the others' vehicle designs.

Part III

This scenario takes place immediately after the previous one. As such, any vehicles destroyed in the previous scenario are not used, and any damaged vehicles remain damaged. (If either side lost all of its vehicles in the previous scenario, the opposing side automatically wins this one. If both sides lost all of their vehicles, this scenario is skipped, and is considered a draw.)

ARF has gotten its vehicles up to speed, and is pursuing the BILL agents. (ARF's reinforcements are guarding the compound; besides, they wouldn't recognize the BILL vehicles anyway.) Predictably, the action has spilled onto the highways. BILL thought they would throw ARF off the trail by going the wrong way on the highway. They were wrong.

Place five clean, straight highway sections. BILL vehicles are placed first on the next-to-last section, traveling whatever speed that player wants. ARF agents are placed on the last section, again moving whatever speed the ARF player wants.

New sections are added once a previous section is emptied (or if there are less than three empty ones in front), at random as follows:

- 2d Road Type Added**
- 2 merge ramp
- 3 small right curve
- 4 large right curve
- 5 Straight debris road section
- 6-8 Straight clean road section
- 9 Straight debris road section
- 10 large left curve
- 11 small left curve
- 12 merge ramp

In addition, if doubles come up on this roll, there is another vehicle on the road. The BILL player chooses a car or cycle from the Sample Vehicles section (or any agreed-upon source). The ARF player determines its speed and places it on the edge of the new section, facing towards the players' vehicles. These vehicles aren't interested in autoduelling; they will follow the road in a straight line (turning as necessary to follow the road, but driving over debris or into vehicles) until they travel off the far edge.

ARF's objective is to kill the driver from the previous scenario. BILL's objective is to destroy or disable all of the ARF vehicles, or to have the driver from the previous scenario escape by having his vehicle (or a vehicle he's in) escape by distancing itself from ARF; if that vehicle can get five sections of road between it and all ARF agents, it will escape.

Unlike the previous scenario, both players get to see all the other players' vehicle designs (including their current state).

Part IV

As it turns out, BILL was working on an experimental retrovirus that will render the human body capable of withstanding tremendous damage, without suffering the traditional effects of incapacitating trauma. Dr. Woo's Pituitary-Adrenal Stimulant, if it proves effective, could change the face of the world.

ARF has either synthesized their own Woo-PAS retrovirus from notes stolen in Part I, or acquired a final sample from BILL's San Francisco labs while they were distracting BILL's other forces in Parts II and III.

In this scenario, ARF needs to escape the BILL agents with the sample. BILL needs to retrieve the sample.

The ARF player has \$40,000 to design as many (or few) cycles and trikes as he wants. The BILL player has \$40,000 to design cars; the amount spent must be divided equally between cars. Thus four cars must each cost \$10,000 (or less), two cars must cost \$20,000 each, etc. Designs *can* be different between cars, however.

The ARF player places his forces first along one edge of the map, and sets speeds. BILL places its forces next, putting them 500 feet away. Both players agree on the left and right boundaries of the map.

Once all forces are placed, ARF reveals which cyclist has The Canister. The canister has the retrovirus sample inside it. If need be, the canister can be thrown the same distance as a grenade (or less); if another cyclist is within that range, he can catch it automatically . . . *unless* there is another vehicle in between the thrower and the catcher. Then the catcher must make a skill roll. If it fails, it lands beyond the catcher on the ground; picking it up is an automatic action for a stopped vehicle. BILL agents cannot exit their vehicles or otherwise acquire or destroy the canister.

ARF wins this scenario if it gets an agent with the canister off the opposite side of the map. BILL wins if it stops all ARF agents. Neither side is aware of the other's vehicle designs.

Part V

"Stop stammering and speak, Skull!"

"Dr. Jahn, s--sir, we have some information regarding the Woo-PAS retrovirus. It seems that it has mutated; it still provides the heightened protection from physical form, but it inflicts its user with a measure of berzerker madness that seems, at this time, to be incurable."

"Hm. Interesting. And how have you learned this?"

"Well . . . there were some rabbits BILL was testing on."

"And have you acquired these rabbits?"

"Well, Dr. Jahn, sir, the latches on the cages we purchased turned out to be much trickier than we originally thought . . ."

ARF, ever-believers in the proverbial Plan B, were successful in infiltrating agents into the BILL San Francisco labs. Unfortunately, not everything went according to plan.

The rabbits escaped.

These mutated Woo-PAS infected rabbits are both a danger and a tremendous opportunity, depending on their fate.

By this point in the campaign, BILL and ARF are running low on available vehicles and skilled drivers.

Each player gets \$20,000 to design as many (or as few) vehicles as they want. Both players should agree on a map; at the very least it should include a building in the center (the lab the rabbits escaped from), and quite probably other buildings around there.

Players alternate placing vehicles, starting with BILL. If one player runs out of vehicles, the other places the rest of his. Speed is then randomly determined for each vehicle: 1dx10 mph. (The chaos of the situation has led to a lot of vehicular scrambling.)

Finally, each player places 10 rabbits, alternating one at a time; this time ARF goes first. Use pedestrian tokens (or make your own bunny tokens); for ease of play, each still takes up a full square. Because of the retrovirus' effects, each rabbit can take three hits of damage without any penalties; on the fourth hit the rabbit dies.

Woo-PAS infected rabbits all start out at 30 mph, and will not alter their speeds. Each time a rabbit has an option to move, it will move in the exact opposite direction of the nearest vehicle . . . even if this means hopping uselessly off the side of a building. (In the case of a rabbit being near two or more equidistant vehicles, roll randomly to see which vehicle he's fleeing from. Yes, this can mean running under the tires of another vehicle. Squish!)

ARF agents want to capture one of the rabbits; this mutated strain of virus could prove *very* useful in its global anarchy plans. To capture a rabbit, a driver must begin the turn adjacent to one, and its speed must be 0 mph (after deceleration). The rabbit will then freeze up. It will take 1 full second to grab the rabbit if on a cycle or trike, 2 full seconds if in a car. The driver now has the rabbit, and can drive off normally. If a vehicle containing a rabbit crashes or is otherwise taken out of commission, the rabbit takes one hit of damage, then bounds out of the vehicle to flee again. Targeting a rabbit is -5, but they are treated as pedestrians if struck by a vehicle.

The ARF player wins if it exits a map edge with a living rabbit. The BILL player wins if it manages to eliminate all the rabbits. If a rabbit manages to escape the side of the map (and isn't being carried by an ARF agent), *neither* player wins this scenario; ARF cannot control that rabbit's chaos (seriously limiting its usefulness), and BILL will have a possible bio-environmental nightmare on its hands.

Epilogue

If BILL wins more scenarios than ARF, it has managed to contain the Woo-PAS virus for its own purposes. Tampering in nature's domain will carry on as planned, and they will begin trying to work out the bugs of their experiment and develop a sellable product.

If ARF wins more scenarios than BILL, it will have what it believes to be a powerful tool in its goals of promoting global anarchy.

In the event of a tie, both sides are able to claim victory . . . BILL has the research at its disposal, but it also will have to deal with those pesky government phone calls once the Woo-PAS strain pops up in a town or two . . .

Regardless, it will quickly become apparent that the retrovirus does not work entirely as either side wants. Rather, regardless of whether it is sold as a stimulant or released in the wild, it will mutate into a variant of the common cold; humans who catch it will feel sick, but deny it and violently insist on going to work, school, or otherwise out in public as normal. Whichever side was able to claim victory *will* claim a small consolation, however, as they will be able to develop the specially formulated Wootang Elixir; this therapeutic citrus beverage will counteract the worse effects of the Woo-PAS cold strain.

Origins Report: Back in the Saddle Again

by Micah Jackson

(Editor's note: This is the follow-up to the [Origins Awards ceremony report](#), posted late in last week's issue. Check that one out if you haven't yet!)

COLUMBUS, OH -- Though thought of by most gamers as "the convention that is not Gen Con," Origins is trying hard to shake that reputation and to come into its own as a summer con in its own right. Last weekend (July 5-8) it showed the nearly ten thousand attendees what it had going for itself. We were mightily impressed. Origins has a lot in common with its older and bigger sister Con, but it is not only a copy.

Part of its problem had been that it moved to a different city each year. Recently the location has stabilized as Columbus, which like Milwaukee, is a decent sized midwestern city that is easy to get to (my plane ticket was less than bus fare), safe at night, and where the people are glad to see us coming. Unlike Milwaukee, Columbus gives Origins room to grow. The convention center is much larger than the current size of the Con. That might give the impression that Origins is sparsely attended, but it actually reveals that the Origins planning committee is actually planning, which is a very good thing.

Speaking of the Origins committee . . . The show is owned by the Game Manufacturers Association ([GAMA](#)), the industry trade organization. However, in recent years GAMA contracted the management of the show to Andon, which became part of Wizards of the Coast. Beginning next year, GAMA will again be managing Origins themselves. This is certainly something to watch out for, but given the attention the GAMA crew gave to the attendees (players and exhibitors alike) it should be a pleasure to see.

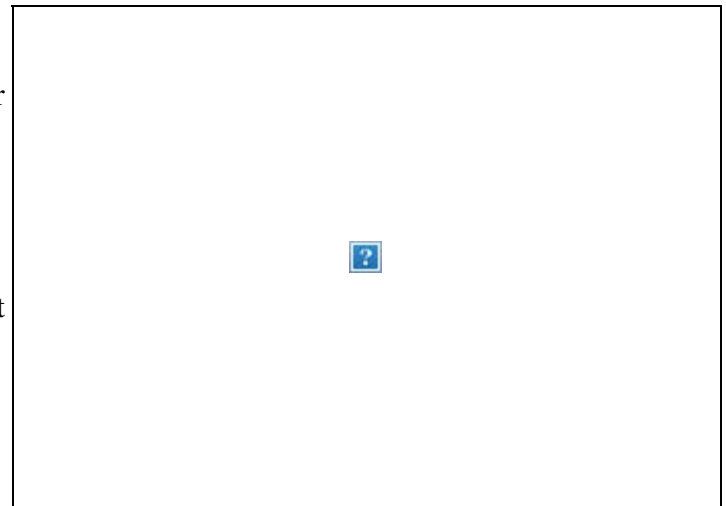
New And Notable

Companies like to release new products at conventions. This gives those releases a shot of buzz on the floor and brings people to the booth, stimulating sales. Traditionally, the Con for big releases was Gen Con, but there were several excellent new releases at Origins this year, another sign of Origins health and growing importance.

A few years ago, [Gold Rush Games](#) released *Sengoku: Chanbara Roleplaying in Feudal Japan*. The latest supplement for this game -- which was picked as the Best Historical Game of 1999 by AniMail Newsletter/[Central Park Media](#) -- is *Shinobi: Shadows of Nihon*. The Shinobi, known to most Americans as the ninja, are some of the most feared, and certainly most mysterious warriors in all of Japanese history.

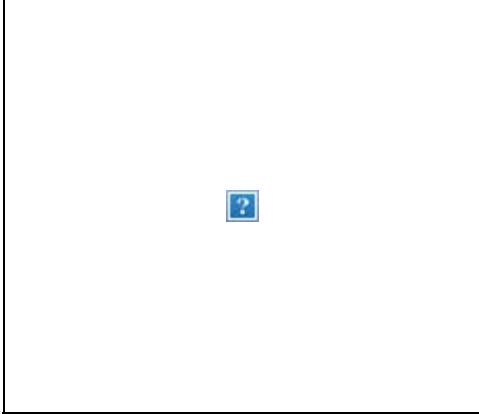
This book describes their history, the philosophy, training, methods, equipment, everything you could possibly want to know about the shadow warriors. As Darren-Jon Ashmore and Mark Arsenaault, the authors, are both students of Japanese history, the book is as historically accurate as it is possible to be. However, they are also fans of the Chanbara, so the folklore and cinematic quality of the Shinobi are included as well. This combination of history and fantasy is what made *Sengoku* so good. It serves *Shinobi: Shadows of Nihon* just as well.

After the release of *Hunter: The Reckoning*, many people wondered whether [White Wolf](#) would find a new project worthy of their creativity and the gamer's dollar. Some thought that, having described all the major players in the World of Darkness, the White Wolf staff should just issue a memo, "Last one out, turn off the lights." But, at the same



Con which saw *Vampire: The Masquerade* inducted into the Academy of Adventure Gaming Hall of Fame, they squelched all that talk with the release of *Exalted*. That's right. No colon, no gerund. And that's not all that's surprising about this game. It's an epic game about the "second age": the time before the World of Darkness. If you imagine High Fantasy as done by Clark Ashton Smith you won't be far off. White Wolf is not far off, either. *Exalted* is beautiful, large, and about to make quite the splash in the world of gaming. Check it out.

Blast From The Past



If one were to suggest that Origins had a centerpiece other than the games, it would have to be the [Origins Awards](#). The names of the nominees and the winners have been printed [elsewhere](#). However, it needs to be said that all the fans who missed the awards presentation itself lost out on a wonderful opportunity. Rarely is there such a good chance to see the hobby's best writers, artists, and designers in the flesh, and see them rise to the occasion, or be embarrassed by their own success. And it's even more rare to see them do it while wearing ties! The awards presentation itself gets more entertaining every year as the Academy Committee develops a vision of itself, its awards, and the presentation. The biggest flaw in the awards show this year was that it was too far away. In the future, the Origins committee will do well to move it into a more central location. No one accidentally wandered by and discovered what a

wonderful thing they were missing. This is how people discover great games, and this is how people will discover the Origins Awards.

Another giant hit of every Origins that is present at no other show is the annual Smithee Awards. Named for the greatest maker of bad films ever, Allen Smithee (the pseudonym used by directors who are embarrassed by the movie), the Smithees are a celebration of all things dumb about the film business. Nominated films this tenth incarnation (which don't have to be from the last year) included such stinkers as *Demon Keeper* and *Murdercycle*.

Awards are given in 19 categories such as "Wanna Run That By Me Again," which is awarded to the film with the most incomprehensible dialogue, "Let's Up the Rating to 'R'," for the most pointless or confusing nude scene, and "Stupidest Looking Monster." The Smithee committee risks their VCRs and their sanity all year to choose the nominees and then screens the clips at Origins, allowing the attendees to vote for their favorites live. It's a hoot and a half, but be warned: it can last three hours and a half.

Heard On The Street

Rumors and speculation abound at conventions, some of which turn out to be true (making everyone say they knew it all along), and others which dissipate with time (leaving no one to admit they ever believed them). Here are some of the top ones from Origins 2001.

d20 seems to have legs. Last year, people thought that the "open source" nature of the project would flood the market with sub-standard products, thereby cheapening the value of *d20* and because of its connection to *Dungeons & Dragons*, the hobby as a whole. It certainly was true that many *d20* products came out since the release of the *Player's Handbook*. Interestingly, the distributors seem to have learned from the CCG mess and aren't automatically buying whatever comes out. As a result, the quality of what is available in the FLGSs is generally very good. And there certainly have been some excellent products that wouldn't have been possible without opening up *d20* to other developers. Origins Award winner *Death in Freeport*, ([Green Ronin Publishing](#)) as a dark fantasy title, would have been difficult more than a year ago, and [Avalanche Games'](#) scenario *Last Days of Constantinople*, set in historically accurate brothel in 1453, would have been impossible. The inevitable shakeout isn't over, but neither is it likely to be as painful as the one that punished those who had blind faith in CCGs.

Consensus on the floor was that [John Kovalic](#) is the "nicest man in gaming." He was frequently in his booth, signing autographs and graciously accepting the praise being heaped on his comics and other artwork. His take on gamers,

which pokes fun without being mean, is hilarious. Just seeing his latest t-shirt for Gilly the Perky Goth ("putting the romance back in necromancy") can restore one's flagging faith in the basic fun nature of gaming. He was sharing his booth with Phil and Kaja Foglio who weren't so much pushing their latest comic *Girl Genius* as they were watching helplessly as the first two issues flew off the shelves. If the industry isn't careful, the Origins Award for Best Game Related Short Work (won this year by "Matt and Gilly's Big Date" from *Dork Tower #11*) will become the de facto Best Graphic Storyline.

One final topic of discussion on the floor, a technical one, which doesn't concern most gamers directly, but surely affects the manufacturers' attitudes, was the changing of the guard in [Wizards of the Coast's](#) event management. For several years, Lisa Klingler has been the go-to woman for questions and problems experienced by exhibitors. This was her last Origins, and she will be leaving the company altogether after Gen Con. I'm certain that GAMA and WotC will find competent people to take over her job, but she will be missed by all who ever benefited from her sunny demeanor and willingness to help. And that list is long and distinguished indeed.

Dark Of The Night

Origins isn't the late-night hotbed that Gen Con can be. Still, there were several overnight events that make gaming cons what they are. Of course there was 24-hour-a-day gaming in the open gaming area. LARPs ran into the early part of the morning, with many participants. There was the traditional industry insider poker game, after which one person claimed to have won \$17 and one claimed to have taken home \$200. Apparently, this was magic money, since no one was admitting to having lost. The City of Columbus' summer movie series fortuitously featured *Raiders of the Lost Ark* on Sunday night, which many gamers enjoyed. Many of the hobby's most famous members were spotted together enjoying platters of sushi at a local restaurant. And, as always, there were many writers, artists, and developers eating and drinking together in the Big Bar on 2 plotting the future of the hobby.

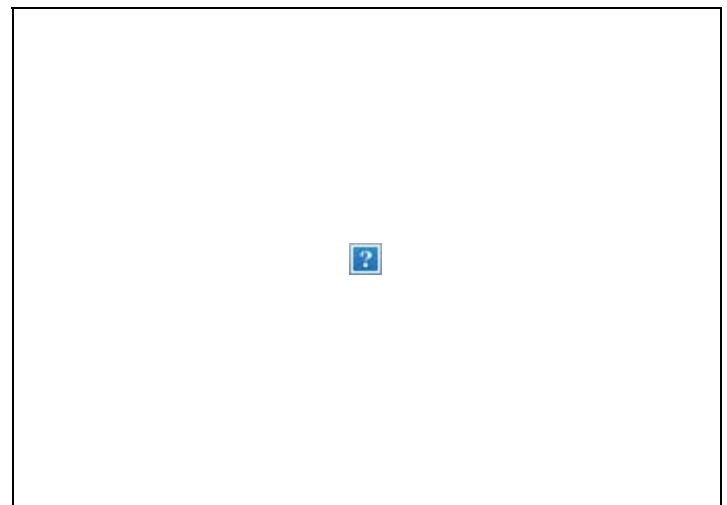
By The Numbers

People seem to be interested in the little details that go to make up a convention. Well, here's some demographic information I got from Origins management about who comes to the con. 39% of the attendees are between 25-34 years old. 86% of all attendees have at least some college education, with 19% holding at least one advanced degree. Nearly half of all Origins attendees have annual household incomes greater than \$50,000. 93% own their own computers, and 94% say they have access to the Internet at home. Now, it is true that 82% of attendees are male, but even that is a significant increase in female attendance in recent years. Those of us who attend convention know that the stereotype that cons are populated only by 15-year-old *Magic: The Gathering* players are false. Now we have some evidence to use when dispelling those misunderstandings.

Coming Up

Origins will be returning to Columbus July 4-7, 2002. If you're upset with the crowds at Gen Con, think about coming to Origins instead. Or, better yet, come to both. They each their advantages, and as they separate themselves in time more in coming years (Origins is getting earlier) it will be easier to attend both shows. There will be some fabulous prices and special deals in effect for next year as GAMA tries to grow the show. Take advantage of them. I'll see you there.

Finally, like the song says, "One down, one to go. Another town and one more show." I will again be at Gen Con in Milwaukee August 2-5. If you're going to be there, look for me on the floor and say hello. In preparation for that show, I am again receiving e-mail at genconreport@hotmail.com. If you



have a question, a comment, or a coverage suggestion/request,
drop me a line. Until then, as always, may the dice go your way.

Pyramid Review

Gear Krieg: The Roleplaying Game

Published by [Dream Pod 9](#)

Written by James Maliszewski & Chris Steward

Illustrated by Kieran J. Yanner, John Wu, & Marc Ouellette

208 pages; \$32.95

Every once in a while you get a thematic trend in RPGs, and with the sixtieth anniversary of the USA's entry into World War II fast approaching, guess what? 2001's big theme is The Big One. Not since FASA's *Behind Enemy Lines* has there been a WWII RPG, but standby for an onslaught! Pinnacle has promised us *Weird Wars* -- World War II and horror for the d20 system; Pagan Publishing has *Godlike* in the works, a dark game that combines WWII and superheroes; and Steve Jackson Games have a whole line planned for *GURPS*, which will play it "straight." First out of the gate with a preemptive strike is Dream Pod 9 with their fourth RPG, a companion to their WWII and 'mecha' miniatures system, *Gear Krieg*.

Gear Krieg: The Roleplaying Game is described as the game of "two fistful pulp role playing in a world at war!" It is set in 1941, in the early part of the war prior to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. The setting in the game is ours, but with a number of additions that give it the feel of the pulps and what it calls "Superscience!" For the main conflict between the Allied and Axis forces, this is the addition of machines known as walkers. These are essentially armored cars that come with both legs and wheels, and are thus capable of on- and off-road travel. The Nazis have found Walkers or "Panzerkampfers" highly effective in the new lightning war tactics employed in the Low Countries and Eastern Europe. Nikolai Tesla developed huge death rays that the French deployed in the failed Maginot Line. Scientists on both sides continue to develop applications from the ideas found in SuperScience!

Into this modern age arena come the players as the heroes cut from the pulp mode. They are the gallant individuals who take it upon themselves to fight the evil machinations of the forces opposed to democracy. Like other DP9 games, *Gear Krieg* uses the Silhouette game engine, with the character generation pitched at the Adventure or even Cinematic point levels. What changes have been made to reflect the pulp genre are merely cosmetic, such as the emergency dice rules seen in previous games renamed Daring Dice.

Despite the ease of creating a character, nowhere in the book does the game show you what a character should be like in the *Gear Krieg RPG*. After the book's opening color text, several archetypes are described and then pop up throughout the book in the various rules examples. But no stats are given for them, or any other NPC. Neither is there an example of character generation. Further, the game does little to define characters' places in the world. One suggestion is to have them operate as agents of the impotent League of Nations, perhaps as part of one of their Plenipotentiary Teams.

Problems abound in the layout of the book as well. After all, when the first dreaded reference to page 'XX' appears nine pages in, one's hackles tend to rise. While such errors are infrequent, they are common enough to be annoying. The first part of the book is devoted to a gazetteer of the world of 1941, but although an interesting and useful read, it is hampered by area maps that contain spelling mistakes. Further it is obvious that modern maps have been used: Pakistan and Bangladesh are present, French Indochina is called Vietnam, and the Dutch East Indies is called "Indonasia." It would have been nice to see more period maps used in their place.

Considering that *Gear Krieg* is a game about pulp action and Superscience!, there is very little about the latter in the

book. Apart from the walkers in the vehicle section there are only a few items detailed. Only one of those -- the rocket pack -- is not a weapon. There are rocket guns, laser rifles, radar pistols, electric guns, and sonic guns, none of which are illustrated. Described as far from everyday weapons, their inclusion has the feeling of being an afterthought. The equipment section is short, with a focus on the personal weaponry employed throughout WWII. Many guns are illustrated, but in a game where a character's choice of sidearm is down to favoritism, you have to wonder why that pulp mainstay, the Mauser Broom-handle pistol, was omitted.

A set of abstract rules is included for the GM to allow the use of vehicles in the game. These are a cut down version of the miniatures rules and are supported by a list of civilian vehicles, tanks, and walkers. Oddly, the only aircraft on that list is an autogyro. Since air travel can play a big part of the pulp genre, this is another omission, which could have been supported by additions to the abstract rules given. This is especially irksome, since the skills section includes the Aircraft Pilot skill.

The section for the GM is an improvement, with a good examination and discussion of the components that make up the pulp genre. These are then included in a set of tables that guide the GM through the random creation of an adventure. These work well, providing the bare bones onto which a GM can build their scenario. A special note is made of the game conventions, particularly the ubiquitous cliffhanger. An example adventure outline is generated using these tables to show them in action. The book is rounded out with "Wolf In Sheep's Clothing," a campaign outline. This details the major characters involved, numerous locations and the stages of the campaign through to its conclusion. It still leaves a lot of work for the GM to do, and many of *Gear Krieg's* omissions are not going to help that effort. In fact, the randomly generated adventure is actually of more use than the campaign outline. Despite the general usefulness of the GM's section, one has to wonder why no bibliography is included for their reference on either the pulp genre or any aspect of WWII.

Gear Krieg: The RPG is a game with a problem or few. The main are the glaring omissions: no character examples, no NPC details, no real adventure, and the relegation of the Superscience! element to the background. These shortcomings all serve to leave the reader with a feeling that it is still incomplete. Further, if the game is to follow the history of the War, then the opportunities for play may become increasingly limited. One option for any prospective GM may be to set their game a few years earlier, which may open up greater adventure possibilities. The number of problems with *Gear Krieg* means that a GM cannot pick this up and play without a considerable amount of effort. Equally, this also reduces the usefulness of the book to someone running the *Gear Krieg* miniatures game who wants to include roleplaying aspects. These problems could have been solved with a greater attention to detail and the addition of another forty pages. Yet I am sure that all this will be fixed in a companion or future supplement.

-- *Matthew Pook*

Pyramid Review

[Dangerous Places: Health, Safety and Archaeology](#)

Published by [Greenwood Publishing Group](#)

Edited by David A. Poirier and Kenneth L. Feder



Bergin & Garvey, Westport Connecticut, 2001

264 pages; \$22.00 softback

Archaeology is a prime adventuring career. In fiction and gaming, archaeologists discover powerful ancient artifacts, are blessed by long-entombed gods, keep evil empires from plundering the magic of the past, unearth monsters best left buried, and discover any number of things man was not meant to know. Yet for all that we gamers make use of archaeology, we really don't know that much about its real threats. At least not according to authors of *Dangerous Places: Health, Safety and Archaeology*, a collection of essays detailing the real threats that contemporary archaeologists face in the field. Several of the authors open their essays by pointing out that the layman's ideas of archaeological hazards are wrong, and then present legitimate dangers that would make even the most hardened *Cthulhu* investigator think twice about entering the field.

The book is split into two parts: "Biological Hazards," and "America's Colonial and Industrial Legacy."

Part One details biological hazards faced by North American archaeologists at the end of the 20th century. Anyone interested in using archaeology as a starting point for adventure from the Victorian era forward should find this section a handy reference and inspirational guide. While the data is geared towards the 1990s, the authors do a good job of explaining how these threats were discovered, how long they existed before discovery, and where you can expect to encounter them. It takes little work to backdate the information to any timeframe that had serious archaeological study.

Some chapters are more useful to gamers than others; the chapters on rabies and Lyme disease are interesting provide solid data (the discussion of rabies' behavioral symptoms is valuable), but the diseases are too commonplace and well understood for them to evoke much mystery. The closing chapters on Scourges of the Dead and Parasites balance this nicely, as they give quick, evocative lists of vectors, symptoms, and cures for diseases that can curse an expedition, force a doctor to strut his stuff, bedevil an archaeologist or give reason for government agents to close off an area. It also lists how long these threats can survive in dead environments (tombs, corpses, etc.), in case you ever need to know.

The other four chapters in Part One list an array of things that want archaeologists sick or dead. Two chapters, "The Fungus Among Us" and "Nasty Little Things: Molds, Fungi and Spores" are of obvious interest to *Cthulhu* keepers with a Mi-Go fixation, providing information on fungal infections for use as red herrings, double blinds, or factual verisimilitude. "Of Mice and Men" discusses the threats of rodent infestation, diseases, and the fact that mice and rats like to sleep in skeletal cavities . . . a fact sure to make the investigators jump at least once. Finally, "Histoplasmosis" gives the poop on archaeological mycosis. Did you know that Lord Carnarvon died of insidious pneumonia, likely caused by the bat and guano infested corridors on King Tutankhmen's tomb? At least, that's what the professionals *think* . . .

Part Two covers urban dangers good for any setting in the 20th and 21st century. Again, some of these are not very useful in a game setting -- "Get the Lead Out" contains more than you ever needed to know about lead contamination in the modern world -- but some are quite useful. For example, did you know that the key component of embalming fluids from the Civil War to 1910 was arsenic? Sometimes several pounds of it. Can any fan of Lovecraft not start

wondering whether or not that was a concentrated attempt to cull or destroy a ghoulish race run rampant in the killing fields of the Civil War? Or is it something worse?

One chapter, "Dig Fast, Die Young," discusses the threat of unexploded ordinance. While the advice is bland from a gamer perspective (no notes on how to defuse them, alas), the six pages of ordinance diagrams provide great handout-ready sketches. "Beneath City Streets" opens with an anecdote about archaeologists -- submerged to their calves in the tunnels under Boston -- taking a sample of the odd smelling water, only to have it dissolve the Styrofoam cup. Given the odd locales in which PCs find themselves, GMs shouldn't have problems putting them places best left avoided.

Part Two is most useful for Storyteller GMs as a useful guide to the pervasive nature of Vampiric control, the Wyrms' corruption of the environment, or the machinations of the Technocracy. It's full of things western culture has done when it should have known better, and the bitter aftermath of those decisions on the landscape. Some of these are downright scary, perfect for use as threatening battlefield conditions against raging Werewolves or crusading Magi (or suitably inhospitable lairs for solitary Kindred).

The greatest problem with *Dangerous Places* for gamers is that it isn't written with roleplaying in mind. The articles are aimed at professional archaeologists, but there's a lot here for the dedicated layman searching for inspiration of verisimilitude. If you're looking to diagnose the strange disease sweeping through Miskatonic's Central American dig, or the excuses FEMA agents will use when they cordon off an area in their HAZMAT suits, this book is an invaluable resource.

--*Brian Rogers*

Four-World Pileup: Alternate Autoduels

"Some players may find themselves saying, 'That's not how they do it in Car Wars! Of course not.'"
-- Christopher J. Burke and Robert J. Garitta, *GURPS Autoduel*, 2nd Edition, p. 111

When it comes time to stand on the gas, throw in the brake, and send the world spinning into a hundred-mile-an-hour bootlegger reverse, there's nothing more fun than taking something fun somewhere -- or somewhen -- else. And nothing's more fun than car fights, unless it's automatic weapons fire. In honor, then, of the retooled *Car Wars*, here's four more arenas suitable for -- heck, specifically engineered for -- autoduelling. To play any of them may require tweaking the rules, making up new counters, and generally doing what all you gearshift gearheads want to do anyway. That, and car fights with automatic weapons.

*"Hey, hey, hey, I was born a rebel
Down in Dixie, on a Sunday morning.
With one foot on the brake, and one foot on the pedal,
I was born a rebel."*
-- Tom Petty, "Born A Rebel"

And you thought Kansas was bloody. The Confederacy wrenched Oklahoma away from the Union in the 1863 Peace of London, only to lose it in the 1917 Congress of Berlin resolving the Great War. With Germany distracted in a collapsing Russia, however, the C.S.A. took Oklahoma back during the Second Western War -- only to see a grossly corrupt referendum vote in a Republican governor with Union ties twenty years later. The Potomac Incident irradiated both Washington and Richmond, removed restraining federal oversight from many states, and forced the Great Powers to order both sides to keep the peace and remove all "heavy weapons" from Oklahoma. This left a pro-Union governor nominally in charge, depending on "contributed units" of the Kansas and Missouri National Guard to control a surly Reb population. And this "occupation" (or "restoration") drove every hothead in both republics to Oklahoma.

Because that's the other interesting thing about the state -- since both sides built highways there during the industrial era, it's the only place on the continent that the Confederate and Union interstate systems interlink. U.S. 77 and U.S. 66 drive south and southwest from Ft. Larned, Kansas and Ft. Crowder, Mo., bringing convoys of Union GEVs to reinforce Republican rule just as Southron truckers roll shipments of Maxim-guns up the M35 from Dallas and out M40 from Little Rock into "Little Dixie". Oklahoma City is a wide-open Casablanca (or Saigon) boiling with insurgents, 'bacco traffickers, gun-runners, spies, journalists, wildcat oilmen, and mercenaries -- all of whom arm their cars to the grilles. A thousand tiny skirmishes boil up on Oklahoma's wide highways as Fords and BMWs slug it out against Tuckers and Peugeots. Both sides know that to restore order is to invite war -- but allowing autoduel anarchy tilts them helplessly into it anyway. PCs in this *Alternate Earths-Autoduel* campaign can fly either American flag (or both) as conspirators, provocateurs, or wheelmen-for-hire. Or, they can take a military role as Confederate commando "advisers" or as U.S. Army special ops putting the pedal to the metal to drive old Dixie down.

*"Tonight I'll be on that hill 'cause I can't stop
I'll be on that hill with everything I got
Lives on the line where dreams are found and lost
I'll be there on time and I'll pay the cost
For wanting the things that can only be found
In the darkness on the edge of town."*
-- Bruce Springsteen, "Darkness on the Edge of Town"

Did you ever wonder where all the American mammoths went? Did you ever wonder who the First People of Choctaw -- and Mandan, and Zuni -- legend were, and why their successors all had to emerge from caves into a world empty of people? Did you ever wonder what happened to the Vikings? The Mound-Builders? The answer lies in the American ley-grid, which releases monsters -- horrible phantoms constructed of psychotectonic energy -- every millennium or so. America is the skull of the Earth, and the planet's nightmares materialize there. And when Eisenhower laid the interstate network down, he woke them up early.

This *Atomic Horror-Autoduel* crossover can stay covert, in a 1950s *Black Ops* mode as the Autoduelists in Black of Strike Force Corvair show up to secretly eradicate a nest of Wendigo or to crush a phantom incursion and blame it on "invaders from Mars." In a lower-powered game, the PCs can be the misunderstood teens whose drag-racin' ways are all that can save Green Valley from the Thing From The Interstate. Or the game can go full-bore as dark forces pour out of the heartland on a wave of Plymouth Furies and malevolent semi-trailers, and the forces of decency and humanity come to depend on road warriors armed with experimental weapons in Detroit's finest.

*"Well, these diamonds on my windshield
And these tears from heaven
Well, I'm pulling into town on the Interstate
I got a steel train in the rain
And the wind bites my cheek through the wing
And it's these late nights and this freeway flying
It always makes me sing."
-- Tom Waits, "Diamonds on My Windshield"*

After the Manafall, the U.S. was on top of the world. The manatech in Albuquerque just added another layer of American knowhow, and the physicists had proven that trying to set off another bomb someplace would destroy the world rather than give anybody else a magical edge. Unfortunately, the Soviets didn't always believe their scientists -- and come the 1990s, they desperately needed a magical edge. Whether it was an abortive launch against American soil, a desperate ploy by Communist hardliners, or just badly-maintained warheads and a hard freeze, the result was the same -- the Hellstorm smashed every atom of rational, civilized order on the planet and knocked everything back to the Bronze Age.

Well, almost everything. By 1991, Americans had more magic, and more manarads of exposure, per capita than any people in the world -- and maybe that was what let them keep the two things they loved more than anything else: their cars, and their guns. The whole population seems to have magically stabilized those two things, allowing them to remain functional when no other technology is. Of course, even in America, the Hellstorm hit hard; the Federal Government was particularly badly battered, and powerful mages set themselves up as sheriffs where other authority disintegrated. Some were selfless; working hard to protect their citizens from bandits, storms, chimerae, and other disasters. Others were -- well, evil magicians. In this *Technomancer-Autoduel* crossover, PCs can work to rebuild America and redevelop magical technology that will work in the new world. And, of course, they can fight immense magical duels while barreling down the highway firing Gatling-cannon rounds at each other in sorcerously-perfect 1956 Eldorados, 1965 Mustangs, and 2000 Prowlers.

*"Cadillac, Cadillac
Long and dark, shiny and black
Open up her engines, let 'em roar,
Tearin' down the highway like a big ol' dinosaur."
-- Bruce Springsteen, "Cadillac Ranch"*

Or, you can borrow a spare from Philip Jose Farmer, get a jumpstart from Roger Zelazny, and connect the whole set. A highway runs across, or along, or between Time. Yearposts dot the roadside, along with truck stops, diners, and the inevitable roadside attractions. ("SEE the World's Largest Pyramid of Skulls! Only 28 years ahead, at Exit 1403!") The rate at which years and miles correspond varies along the way, with years spread out in historically-congested areas and bunched together in the long, desert stretch back to the Cretaceous. Where the road forks, so does history -- if enough people use one fork, it becomes the main highway. If enough people avoid an exit, it degrades into a dirt road, and then disappears entirely. (I steal this idea cheerfully, and openly, from Zelazny's novel *Roadmarks*.) Wildcat civilization engineers often grade, pave, and sign new roads (and put in more gas stations) in the hopes of attracting traffic to a new continuum -- and devotees of the old history tend to oppose them violently.

Which is where the autoduelists come in, in this *Autoduel-Time Travel-Riverworld* crossover campaign. People who love cars and history a little too much, who make a habit of exploring the road less traveled, can sometimes take a

Moebius turn onto the Highway. Reincarnations of famous travelers, from Amelia Earhart to H.P. Lovecraft to Sir Richard Francis Burton drive the Highway as well, always looking to bolster their reputations and see what lies around the next bend. PCs can play bold-hearted gunslingers racing to stop the Autobahn-SS from blocking the London exit at Mile 1940 or defending their turf against marauding cycle gangs like Tengri's Angels or Wotan's Wanderers. They could be joyriders (or hitchhikers) out to cruise the highways of history, or agents of the enigmatic Highway Patrol (which itself fears the still-more mysterious Department of Transportation) keeping a lid on major moving violations. They might even be the staff (or at least the resident protection) of a bar like Marco's Venetian Taverna, roadside museum and gift shop such as Alexander's Coffin, or drive-in theater like the Globe-a-Rama. Dangerous curves ahead -- drive expansively.

First Hit's Free, Kid

We're running a few *Car Wars* and car-related articles this week (as you may have noticed), so I thought I'd mention my tangentially related *Car Wars* story, which may well be my first Steve Jackson Games story.

Back in 1987, when dinosaurs still roamed the earth and *ALF* seemed like a good idea, I was starting to branch out a bit in my gaming tastes. I'd picked up the *Marvel Super Heroes Game*, the *Indiana Jones Adventure Game* (yes, I know . . . hey, I was fourteen at the time! And that series still had some of the best cardboard cutouts! I wish I still had that biplane . . .), *Champions*, and a few other games I'm currently forgetting. But I'd never stumbled across Steve Jackson Games.

So in my Friendly Local Game Shop (which primarily stocked wargames, to give you an idea when this caveman tale takes place) the store owner -- who recognized us despite the fact that we only made it out there two or three times a year -- noticed some of the games I was poring over. And then he made a suggestion: *Mini Car Wars*.

For those of you who never saw it, *Mini Car Wars* was a pamphlet-sized version of *Car Wars*. It contained full-color cut-out paper counters and road sections, and a scaled-down version of the *Car Wars* rules, complete with sample vehicles and weapons.

"How much is it?" I asked, skeptical.

"Go ahead; take one," the storeowner said. "They're normally a dollar, but you're a good customer."

So, whistling merrily as we drove home, I couldn't help but think: "He's giving away a free game? Heh, heh, heh . . . sucker."

That week I got my mom to photocopy the counters. And I played a couple of times. And I enjoyed it.

The next week I made up some more counters and maps, with graph paper and colored pencils. And I still had fun.

The week after that I made up some more rules to add a bit more complexity and options. And I was still enjoying myself.

The week after that I'd wheedled my step-dad into taking me back to our game shop again, several months early. I walked out of the shop with a copy of *Car Wars Deluxe* and *Dueltrack*. My shop got \$30 or so it wouldn't have gained otherwise. And SJ Games gained a customer it didn't have before.

"Heh, heh, heh . . . sucker," indeed.

Mini Car Wars was the first "introductory" game I'd ever seen, designed as a minimal-to-no cost game starter set. But it hasn't been the last. In the past few years there have been several high-quality game introductions released.

Speaking as both a game fan and a recovering retailer, this is a Good Thing. I've said it before: there are more unique and quality games in print right now than any time previously. Unfortunately, it's a lot more difficult to determine if a game is going to be to your liking when you're flipping through it in the store . . . if you even know it exists. After all, games are meant to be *played*.

And that's what these handouts are designed to do. Sure, they may not contain the whole game world, all the rules, or all the little fiddly bits. But they are almost certainly more informative than reading the back of the cover, the advertisements, or hoping to find a reviewer you can trust.

Although my *Mini Car Wars* experience is from several years ago, I suspect the relatively recent surge in these freebies (or near-freebies) has surged, thanks to two things . . . ironically related.

First is the surge in the playable computer game demo. Beginning in embryonic form with shareware in the mid-to-late 80s, I suspect the computer trial download truly hit the center stage with *Castle Wolfenstein 3D* from the early 90s. It has now become commonplace -- indeed, almost expected -- to be able to try out new computer (and many console) games before buying them. Now there was no longer the scary prospect of buying a game sight unseen.

Second is the surge of the electronic format document in the past few years. Before PDFs became commonplace, there weren't many attractive ways to present documents. Postscript wasn't very portable, text wasn't very pretty, HTML wasn't very controllable, and TeX wasn't very intuitive. But having a commonplace means of presenting -- and printing -- a document in the form the creator originally envisioned opens up whole new worlds. Although not all handouts are exclusively PDFs, many are, and having an open format meant that these handouts were no longer limited to companies that could afford to publish attractive mini-products for free.

I'm personally delighted at the number of possibilities that exist for introducing folks to new games . . . both experienced gamers and new would-be players. After all, not everything is going to appeal to everyone, but if only one introductory game kit captures someone's imagination, then that's one new world of exciting possibilities, one new player in the fold, one more sale for stores, and one more bit of growth for the best darn hobby in the world.

This isn't meant to be a comprehensive list, but if I needed to burn my niece or nephew a CD with interesting possibilities, here are some I might choose:

Atlas Games

- *Rune* -- http://www.atlas-games.com/pdf_storage/rune_jumpstart.pdf
- *Ars Magica*, with two jump start kits -- "Promises, Promises" (http://www.atlas-games.com/pdf_storage/promises.pdf) and "Nigrasaxa" (http://www.atlas-games.com/pdf_storage/nigrasaxa.pdf)

Dream Pod 9

- *Heavy Gear Tactical System* -- http://www.dp9.com/Funhouse/PDFS/hg_demo.pdf

Gold Rush Games

- *Legacy of Zorro* -- They have a neat interactive Choose-Your-Own-Adventure-esque mini-tutorial available at <http://www.zorrorpg.com/demo.html>, although I'm not sure how I would format it for my hypothetical niece.

Holistic Design

- *Fading Suns* -- <http://www.fadingsuns.com/FSIntro2.pdf> (This product also exists as a physical product, but I've only ever seen it with the *Noble Armada* miniature ship battle game for *Fading Suns*)

MicroTactix Games

They have a lot of fun things available at <http://www.microtactix.com/new/fun.shtml>. Of particular note are:

- *Vyllage-on-the-Cheep* sample sets #1 and #2 (<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/mtmailbox/files/vcfree.pdf> and <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/mtmailbox/files/vcfree2.pdf>),
- *Vulture Gulch Steamcoach Cannon* (<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/mtmailbox/files/steamtnk.pdf>), and
- *Starbase Omega 3 Sample Set* (<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/mtmailbox/files/sbo3free.pdf>).

Although they aren't games by themselves, they are an easy and interesting introduction into the world of miniatures.)

Pelgrane Press

- *Dying Earth* -- <http://www.pelgranepress.com/qstart.htm> (This page requires JavaScript.)

Steve Jackson Games

- *GURPS* -- <http://www.sjgames.com/gurps/lite/gurpslit.pdf>

West End Games

- *DC Universe Roleplaying Game* -- "Batman vs. Killer Croc" (<http://www.westendgames.com/dcu/bkgame.pdf>), "Superman vs. Doomsday" (<http://www.westendgames.com/dcu/sdgame.pdf>), and "Wonder Woman & Superman" (<http://www.westendgames.com/dcu/wsgame.pdf>)

White Wolf

- *Vampire: The Masquerade* -- <http://www.white-wolf.com/Images/CompleteBooks/VampireRevisedQuickstart.pdf> (This one also exists as a physical booklet published by White Wolf)

Wizards of the Coast

- *Dungeons & Dragons* -- "Caves of Shadow" (<http://www.wizards.com/dnd/files/CavesofShadow.pdf>)

Hopefully my theoretical nephew or niece would walk away with such a CD, chuckling softly.

"Heh, heh, heh . . . sucker."

* * *

Speaking of freebies, tucked in the same box I dug up this week's *Mini Car Wars* I found a pamphlet that was a free mailing from when NBC was updating *Knight Rider*, showing all the equipment modifications and new features for the 1983 season. I'm hoping I never tried to import K.I.T.T. into the *Car Wars*, but it's entirely possible I did, then blotted the horrible memory. May the heavens have mercy on my soul.

--Steven Marsh

* * *

Last week's answer: Intruder, Task Force Game #6. (As an aside, I was *very* surprised at the number of folks who got this one . . . it's over 20 years old.)

(*One star*) "The most popular programs are comedies and action/adventure shows. Typical of TV fare is *McDade*, an action-trucker series, one of the top shows in North America."

Car Wars Card Game Preview

by Philip Reed

We thought you might appreciate a sneak peek at "before and after" shots for a few of the cards from the upcoming new edition of the *Car Wars Card Game*. The redone card graphics by Alex Fernandez are cleaner yet visually more stylized and exciting . . . just like the upcoming *Car Wars* game (hint, hint).

Before



After



The Auto Bomb Anxiety

by Steven Marsh

"Some bastards stole my car!" your friend says, her panic coming through even over the speakerphone.

"Calm down," one of you says, putting on a jacket, ". . .please . . . How long ago? Have you alerted the police?"

"Of course I have!" she sputtered. "I noticed it was missing about half an hour ago. I don't know what I'm going to do! I have to get to work!"

"Don't worry; one of us can give you a ride. I'm sure the police are doing all they . . ."

"Didn't she drive a blue '98 Mercury Sable?" someone else asks, watching the news while eating cold leftover lo-mein.

"Yes, that's it," she says. "Why?"

He finished chewing before continuing. "Well, what do you think the odds are that another blue '98 would explode in a chop shop on the south side?"

"My car!"

* * *

"The Auto Bomb Anxiety" is a modern-day adventure suitable for any number of investigators. It is designed for almost any U.S. city of suitable size; many details are left generic so that GMs can easily adapt it to their campaigns. Likewise no specific RPG system is detailed; it should hopefully be trivial to adapt it to a wide variety of games.

The Back Story

Fourteen years ago, Stokely Romero was found guilty in the murder of Stephanie Belan -- a prominent local business owner and state senator who was found dead in her car -- and the subsequent bombing of her downtown offices.

Fourteen months ago, DNA analysis of the original evidence proved that Stokely Romero was, in fact, innocent. He was released from prison with a hundred dollars, a coat, a plan, and the burning rage of justice denied.

Today, Stokely Romero's plan for vengeance begins to be realized.

The Plan

Fourteen years behind bars can snap a man; such is the case for Stokely. He plans to take his revenge on those he feels are responsible for his situation: the jury that convicted him.

To this end, he has rigged each juror's car (or other vehicle) with an incendiary device; should a bomb go off, the damage to life, limb, and property will be remarkable. Stokely plans on killing the two alternates first, one hour apart; since they went unused, and were thus insignificant in the grand scheme of things, they don't deserve to be part of his grandiose vision. But they still deserve bombs.

Every hour thereafter a bomb will explode, with each juror being targeted in alphabetical order. His goal is not to kill each juror per se; rather, he wants to create the real chance that they *may* be killed by his hand. If they escape (or aren't near their cars), so mote it be. But if fate is as callous towards them as it was towards him, then they will die.

And that is only the beginning of his plot . . .

Running the Adventure

The key to this adventure is to keep it fast-paced; the heroes should have little time to sit around thinking. To that end, the GM will need to make sure the adventure doesn't unfold in "real time" . . . in other words, if the next bomb is scheduled to go off in an hour, the players shouldn't be allowed the luxury to sit around for an hour thinking of plans.

This adventure is different from many, since it places the heroes in a situation where there are many crises to deal at once. They will have an easier time if they realize the (alphabetical) pattern, but should still need to juggle many balls at once.

Finally, this adventure is presumed to be action-heroic, with an eye towards movies like *Die Hard* and *L.A. Confidential*. As such, the tenets of those type of movies should be followed:

The heroes are smarter -- and luckier -- than anyone else. If heroes investigate a scene, they will uncover more information faster than traditional forces. If they intervene in a problem, more lives will be saved than if they didn't. If they interfere, things will generally work out better than if they hadn't. This primarily keeps the PCs from sitting at home eating nachos, hoping it all works out.

Time is dramatic, but doesn't seek to rook the heroes. If the good guys are getting ahead of schedule, there will be complications (like flat tires and traffic jams) that bring them into a more exciting pace.

Fortune favors the bold; as such, the GM should probably reward heroes who do *anything* rather than those who wait. This can be a difficult adventure if the heroes don't figure out a few fundamental facts; in typical action movie tradition, the heroes should get some hints from fate if they're floundering. (Of course, those who have *good* ideas should be equally rewarded . . .)

Getting the Heroes Involved

The opening fiction provides an easy way for the heroes to get involved: one of the heroes' friends was on the jury fourteen years ago as an alternate, and is the first scheduled to die. Fortunately for her (or him), an unscrupulous gentleman stole that car . . . and met his untimely demise -- along with many of his underworld friends -- in a warehouse designed to dismantle and sell cars for parts.

The GM can either skip directly to the *Law & Order*-esque explosion (and its ramifications), or give the heroes the chance to find the car. They have, at most, approximately 50 minutes . . . and not much in the way of leads.

Clues

If the heroes go to the remains of the stolen vehicle in the chop shop on the south side (or, more correctly, the remains of the chop shop), they find it offers little in the way of clues . . . but what it *does* offer may be invaluable. They may also get some leads to other avenues of inquiry. In ascending order of difficulty, some clues that can be gleaned are:

- **Easy:**
 - The bomb went off exactly at 9:00 a.m.
 - Ground zero for the blast was the car.
- **Moderate:**
 - Judging by the pattern of the explosion, in all likelihood the bomb was on the underside of the chassis.

- The bomb was a simple mechanical one, with a timer mechanism. There were no complicated electronics (like a transmitter or computer).
- **Difficult:**
 - If the heroes are lucky, a fragment of the timer mechanism can be found; there will be a partial serial number visible on it. Tracing that information will take a significant amount of time (at least two to three hours); if they persist, they will be able to track it to Mad Mike's Electronics downtown, in a purchase made a month ago. Although Mad Mike's will not know who purchased it (he paid cash), he *will* know that the man bought fifteen of the timers, and they will have (grainy) footage of him from their security cameras. This may aid the investigators later.
 - If the players are clairvoyant, they may think to contact the Department of Transportation. If they are thorough, they will be able to find a mole: Phillip Dyer. Phillip was bribed by Stokely to retrieve the registration records of his fourteen victims. Phillip will not volunteer this information, but can be over-bought, threatened, or arrested. These avenues will take varying degrees of precious time, at the GM's whim.

If the heroes don't investigate the scene, the police will be able to discern the first two facts relatively quickly.

Unless the heroes are very clever, they probably won't have much luck discerning that there even *is* a pattern, let alone what it is. The heroes' friend would not have been directly informed of Stokely's release, but Stokely's incorrect incarceration *did* make local and national news fourteen months ago when it happened. Depending on the specific characteristics of the NPC (and what other NPCs s/he might have), s/he might possibly make the connection earlier.

But they won't have long to wait for another lead.

Interstate Mayhem

At 10 p.m. exactly, Professor Charles Densmoore's car will explode on the interstate seven miles north of town, heading north. Along with taking Densmoore's life, it will significantly destroy a portion of the interstate, severely affecting traffic for months to come. Seven other cars will pile up, with two people injured (non-fatally).

The information that can be determined from that car is roughly similar to that above, only now the heroes should have another victim. If the PCs' friend is prompted, she will remember Densmoore (then a grad student) as the second alternate from that fateful jury duty fourteen years ago. (She may well need a photo of Densmoore to jog her memory . . . the means of acquiring which will be left to the players' imaginations.)

Sorting Pieces, Courses of Action

The heroes should hopefully have a suspect (Stokely Romero) and a loose pattern (jurors) by now. If not, the killings will continue in order until they figure it out; the police will piece it together around 1 p.m., and attempt some of these ideas . . . the loss of life will be incredible.

Perhaps the biggest challenge the heroes face is determining the (alphabetical) pattern Stokely is using. Fortunately, if the investigators use some quick thinking and common sense, they should be able to save lives and make the link. Other aspects, like how the heroes get the jury list, is left to the creativity of the players. As a starting point, several were interviewed by name in the local paper when Stokely was released fourteen months ago. This will take a while, but is better than nothing. From there some of the jurors will remember others' names (enough to get leads), but it will take a while. Probably the best idea is to get the information out of the judicial system . . . here's where those bureaucratic, legal, and political influences and favors will come in *very* handy.

Once the heroes know who the other jurors are, where they go from here is up to them. Here are some possibilities:

Call (or otherwise contact) the remaining jurors, explaining the problem. This is probably the best idea, and is the presumed one. Once the heroes know who they are, seven of the jurors will be easily tracked down and contacted

(including the first one alphabetically); those will easily be taken out of danger, and the authorities can deal with their bombed cars as appropriate. The other five are more difficult -- or impossible -- to contact; those are labeled as (COMPLICATION) below.

Of course, the actions the heroes take here will significantly influence the remainder of the adventure. If they aren't careful, some of the jurors may contact the media; the resultant complications and insanity that might result should be obvious.

If the authorities can disarm several of the bombs, they will be able to determine when they were timed to go off; as such, the heroes should hopefully be able to figure out the pattern (if they hadn't realized it already), and prioritize accordingly.

Alert the Media. *"Attention, city: If you served on the Stokely Romero jury fourteen years ago, or live near someone who served on that jury, be aware that you are in mortal danger of being blown to bits. Unfortunately, the police really cannot do anything to save you. Stay inside. Duck and cover. Have a nice day."*

Unless the heroes are *very* clever, alerting the media could well cause more damage and panic than fourteen bombs. Saying that a city is under full-scale terrorist attack is not a good way to keep the populace calm. Perhaps the best use of the media is to locate the few remaining jurors that the heroes are unable to contact through other means.

Visit the Jurors Individually. Unless the heroes know the pattern, it may be very difficult to just go out and start contacting people. Even if they *do* know the pattern, they only have an hour between bombs to get there in time.

Alert the Police (or Other Authorities). If the heroes aren't working closely with the police by this point, they should start. The authorities are probably going to have the best means of dealing with fourteen car bombs. If the heroes haven't thought of it first, the police will start calling jurors to try to get them out of harm's way, as above. Of course, they don't have "PC" stamped on their forehead, so they won't be as effective.

Alert Anyone on the Federal Level. Unfortunately, the federal government (and its resources like the Army and National Guard) is nothing if not slow; they are more than able to help, but there may be definite timeliness repercussions as requests slog through the appropriate bureaucracy.

The Jurors

Vickie Annis (Juror Number 7)

11:00 a.m.

An algebra teacher at Delta Middle School, Vickie (Miss Annis to her students) is finishing up her pre-lunch class at 10:30 a.m. If sufficiently convinced of credentials, office aids are more than willing to interrupt her; she should be relatively easy to convince. Her car is parked in a faculty parking area near the front of the school. Its bomb is scheduled to go off during the school's lunch period; as such, all the students will be in the cafeteria, near the center of the school and away from the blast. Property damage will be limited primarily to teachers' cars (which will be significant), and superficial damage to that side of the school. One janitor -- Stan Hale -- will receive minor damage and hearing loss from the explosion.

Blake Cardis (Juror Number 12)

Noon

Blake, an architect, is at lunch from 10:30 a.m. through noon. His officemates, if convinced, will supply his cell phone number. Blake, and the Mexican restaurant he's eating at, will be very grateful.

Javier ("Jay") Esposito (Juror Number 8)

1:00 p.m.

COMPLICATION

Jay is a legal courier for the law firm of Hewitt, Davis, & Davis. He was a wild-eyed enthusiastic 18-year-old when he served on the jury; now, at 32, he's still something of a wild man. He is responsible for driving papers and files all over town, and tends to drive like a maniac in the course of his job.

Fortunately, he has a cell phone, which would make him easy to contact. Unfortunately, he has a habit of forgetting that phone at the office. That's exactly what happened this time. If the law firm is sufficiently questioned (no small feat . . . the best chance is to be nice to the secretaries and law clerks), they will be able to find out Jay's general schedule for the day. This basically involves visiting another law firm, the police station, city hall, lunch, the courtroom, the copy shop, and other places downtown. The heroes may attempt to get one of these locales to stop him, but Jay is ruthlessly efficient in his job, and tends to dart in and out of his destinations. It will probably be necessary for the heroes to track him in the open city near one of his destinations; they will either have a description and license of his car from the DMV, or they can get that information from the law office. This may well result in an exciting car chase downtown.

If not found or interrupted, Jay's car will explode at 1:00 p.m. outside city hall, resulting in considerable danger to life, limb, and property.

Cindy Gathers (Juror Number 2)

2:00 p.m.

Cindy was married seven years ago, and moved a couple of states away. She never took her husband's name. Her degree in journalism has since paid off, and she's a successful reporter in her new city. Contacting her will not be a problem, though if measures are not taken to ensure her cooperation, she may well use the crisis to jumpstart a career as a television news reporter.

At 2:00 p.m., Cindy's car is in her newspaper's parking garage.

Adam Matthews (Juror Number 3)

3:00 p.m.

Adam Matthews, a dentist, and his wife Caitlin moved to the opposite side of the state; fortunately, he will still be in the state's DMV records. Caitlin, a mother and homemaker, will be more than willing to help keep her husband safe; she can warn her husband, alert her local authorities, or take any other reasonable actions.

If not found, the bomb will explode at 3:00 p.m. at Dr. Matthews' office.

Lance Orbs (Juror Number 6; Foreman)

4:00 p.m.

COMPLICATION

Since the trial, Lance Orbs has become a successful investment banker, and a prominent and powerful member of the city's society for many years. His address and place of work is relatively easy to figure out; his wife Jamie is more than willing to help. As far as she knows, he is out of town on a conference. She can even supply the investigators with his cell phone number.

Unfortunately, Lance chose the wrong day to continue his affair with longtime fling Amanda Sloan. He has turned his cell phone off, lied to friends and associates about his whereabouts, and generally disappeared off the face of the earth for the day. He is, in fact, at the world-famous five-star Oak Hotel downtown, using an assumed name for himself and his relation; his rigged automobile is parked at the hotel's underground parking garage.

Unless the investigators have a better idea, the most promising avenue would be to question his secretary, Stacey McNair. She doesn't know where Lance is, but knows of Amanda and the affair; it will take a *lot* of convincing to make her reveal this. She also knows he has a taste for the finer things in life. Perhaps most promisingly, she knows the false name he tends to use: Reginald (Reggie) Finnigan. This should give the heroes enough to find him.

Unfortunately, Lance won't answer the hotel room's phone, or otherwise leave the hotel that day unprompted. The heroes will, in all likelihood, need to find him and his room in person and persuade him . . . quite possibly by booting down his door. (Dealing with the hotel and its personnel is left to the heroes.) Alternately, they can find his car without his knowledge and deal with the problem.

If not found, the bomb will go off at 4:00 p.m., causing phenomenal damage downtown and, in all likelihood, destroying a long-time cultural landmark of the city.

Tina Cooper (formerly Tina Pfeifer) (Juror Number 10)

**5:00 p.m.
COMPLICATION**

Since serving on the jury, Tina has fallen on serious misfortune. Shortly after the trial, she started seeing and then married Robert (Bob) Cooper, and took his name. It turns out Bob was not the most noble person in the world, to put it lightly. He verbally abused Tina even before the marriage; this abuse turned physical during the marriage. Bob now keeps Tina a virtual prisoner in her home. They don't have a phone (though Bob has a cell phone, so *he* can have contact with the outside world), and he doesn't allow her to have any of the more easily traceable aspects of modern life, like an Internet connection or bank account. (The driver's license information Stokely bought is over a decade old, but he was able to use it to track her down.)

The investigators will be able to find Tina by uncovering the public records of her marriage, then searching for Robert Cooper. Alternately, they should be able to find some family relations who know of her whereabouts; her brother Eric Pfeifer is still in the city, as is her mother Karen Pfeifer (a widower whose husband died four years ago).

Once her home is found, Tina will show the classic symptoms of Battered Wives' Syndrome; she will have a black eye ("I ran into a cabinet."), a nervous demeanor, and massive amounts of denial. It will be very difficult to persuade her that there is danger; after all, she doesn't even have a car anymore . . . Bob transports her wherever she needs to go. She knows he has a cell phone, but doesn't know the number. She does know the name of the company he works for, however, and the heroes should be able to track him through that.

The heroes should realize now (correctly) that Bob's car has been bombed. Bob is a construction worker, and is currently on-site at a new shopping center in the suburbs. At five o'clock, he will be getting in his car and heading home (having left work ten minutes early). The only casualty will be him, his car, and a lonely stretch of road back into town; this may well present a moral dilemma for morally gray heroes.

Alex Savory (Juror Number 1)

**6:00 p.m.
COMPLICATION**

Alex made his fortune as a dot-com millionaire. More importantly, he sold his investments before becoming a dot-com Ramen-eater, and has invested wisely. As such, he is *very* wealthy. Finding him will not be terribly difficult; he's on the golf course most of the day, but his people will be able to supply his cell phone number. After 4 p.m. he is at home.

Unfortunately, Alex has acquired a hobby since becoming a millionaire: Car collecting. He has forty-six different cars. Twelve are on display at an antique car show that is in town, another ten are being exhibited at another out-of-town show, three are on a semi-permanent loan to a local historic museum, two are on loan to friends, one is being driven by his wife Chelsea, one is with him when he goes driving (otherwise it's in his garage), and the other seventeen are

parked on his estates. Determining which one is rigged to explode will mostly be a matter of checking them all; which one is actually booby-trapped is left to the GM's whims.

If unfound, the bomb will explode at 6:00 p.m. Regardless of which car was chosen by Stokely, the loss of life will be minimal, but the property damage will be significant, expensive, and quite possibly irreplaceable.

Michael Smith (Juror Number 4)

7:00 p.m.

(MILD) COMPLICATION

The number of Michael Smiths in any standard phone book is bound to be oppressive. Worse, this Michael Smith in particular moved since he last renewed his license, and didn't update his information with the DMV.

The Michael Smith in question is the manager of an adult video store on the outskirts of town. He is at work from noon through 8:00 p.m. A couple of his neighbors know where he works, and he has some family in town that also would know of his whereabouts. Tracking him down will be the biggest problem; suitably persuasive people working together should be able to weed through all available Michael Smiths in an hour or two (as dramatically appropriate). Barring that, federal contacts like the IRS will know of his current address.

Donald Unger (Juror Number 5)

8:00 p.m.

Donald is at work from 8:00 a.m. through 5:00 p.m., and is at home in the suburbs after 6:00 p.m. His answering machine gives his work and cell phone numbers (he works as a CPA for a small firm). He is more than willing to believe his life is in danger, and will follow directions with utmost care. If the heroes cannot save his life, it is because fate just doesn't like Donald Unger.

Marla Washington (Juror Number 9)

9:00 p.m.

Marla Washington is a single mom who lives with her mother, Jemma. Jemma is a little hard of hearing, but is more than willing to help properly polite investigators. (Jemma can't leave the house because she's the child's primary babysitter during the day.) Marla works as a clerk at a grocery store from 8:00 a.m. until 6:00 p.m., and then drives straight home. The heroes should be able to intercept her at work or home without difficulty.

Huichun Yan (Juror Number 11)

10:00 p.m.

COMPLICATION

Yan is a Korean immigrant, and lives with his extended family. He speaks English, but the rest of his family does not (at least, not well enough). He currently works days as a computer programmer, and attends higher education classes at night at the local university. He is at work from 9:00 a.m. through 6:00 p.m., eats a quick meal from 6:30 p.m. through 7:00 p.m., and attends a class from 7:30 p.m. through 11:00 p.m. (with a fifteen minute break at 9:30 p.m.). How the heroes find him is left as an exercise for the players; the easiest means would be to get a Korean translator to speak with the family. Barring that, a search of the city's university records would be able to turn him up.

Romero Must Die

Depending on how well the investigators do, they may either have spare time to look for Stokely Romero, or they may be running around town putting out fires. Regardless, at 11:00 p.m. the fruition of Romero's plan will be realized.

In the past fourteen years, the offices where Stephanie Belan worked have since been rebuilt from the rubble left by her murderer (who was not, as it turns out, Stokely Romero). Those offices are now a thriving part of the revitalized downtown; Stokely Romero, as the capper to his mad vision, plans to destroy them . . . and himself, at the same time.

For the past two weeks, Stokely has worked as a maintenance man at those offices. In that time he has rigged the final part of his plan. Throughout this day of madness, he is either working at the three-story office building, or hiding there after it closes. If the heroes don't track him there by 11:00 p.m., Stokely will make an announcement from the roof with a bullhorn.

"Today the people of this city have been afraid to enter their cars. Afraid to walk the streets. Afraid to do the things they have always done. Good! Now you know how I feel. Now you know how I felt fourteen years ago, when I was wrongfully accused, and my life was destroyed.

"This is my final act of vengeance. You believed I killed people? You believe I destroyed this building? Fine . . . let it be true."

Stokely has carefully hidden bombs throughout most of the building. He is holding a dead man's trigger, which also connects to the C-4 vest he's wearing. If he dies, or otherwise lets go, he and the building will explode. Fortunately, downtown is fairly deserted around midnight; there is no real danger of innocent life lost (outside of the authorities, news crews, and heroes). But the damage to the city will be significant.

Stopping Stokely

It is probably up to the heroes to defeat Stokely. There are several possibilities.

Disarm the building. Provided they get him to talk, Stokely is more than willing to rant at length about injustices, lost years, bombs, and cars. Presuming they are sufficiently skilled, this should give the heroes more than enough time to sneak into the building and find the various bombs hidden throughout. There are, of course, fourteen bombs in the building (not counting those strapped to Stokely): five on the first and third floors, and four on the second. Unless the PCs are very clever, they will probably be unable to disarm Stokely. Fortunately, the damage will be significantly reduced with only one explosion to worry about.

Take him down. If he can be subdued while not allowing his hand to release the trigger, this might be possible . . . but it will probably be very difficult. Most likely the heroes will want to sneak into the building, as above. Although more dangerous than the first option, it's a little bit safer in some ways too, since it doesn't rely on an outside source keeping Stokely talking.

Talk him out of it. This will be very difficult, but it might be possible. Possibly the most promising avenue is pointing out that the person who originally committed the murder and bombing fourteen years ago is still free; Stokely may well have information that can put the real culprit behind bars. Pointing out that the real bomber has been living the life that Stokely should have had for the past fourteen years may well work. Other avenues might as well, but he mostly views his life as having been ruined, and wants to lash out.

Bluff him. Pointing out that no one will really care if he *does* blow up himself and this building may give him pause. "After all," the heroes might argue, "We didn't even know who you *were*! The bombing and your arrest were front page news fourteen years ago, but everyone's forgotten by now. In another fourteen years, no one will remember this." This probably won't be enough to stop him, but it might buy some time for other avenues to be pursued.

Resolution

Once Stokely is taken care of (one way or another), the heroes have essentially won. There are probably some loose ends to take care of, either in the form of subplots with the jurors (Tina Cooper, in particular), or finding who *really* committed the murder/bombing fourteen years ago.

Ideally the GM will be able to fade to black by pointing out that it's not even midnight yet . . . it's been a long day.

Adapting to Other Games

"The Auto Bomb Anxiety" should be suitable for a variety of genres and game systems. Here are some ideas:

- *In Nomine* Angels could be the heroes of the adventure; since Stokely is a mortal, detection of him through Symphony disturbances will be difficult. Demons may well try to intervene to allow Stokely's plan a maximum chance of success, or capitalize on the mayhem caused by his actions.
- Likewise the heroes could be low-to-mid-level Supers. In this case, unscrupulous super villains may try to throw the heroes off track by causing their own explosions or destruction.
- Finally, the adventure can be fairly easily adjusted forward or backward in time. Depending on the technology and the judicial system (the existence of cars and a jury are the most important elements for this story), it could easily fit into a near-future or cyberpunk game. Likewise it can fit anytime after cars become routinely available; it could be a good Pulp or *Atomic Horror* adventure, for example. Just change anachronistic references (like cell phones and DNA evidence) to something more appropriate.

Dork Tower!



Dork Tower!



Aristotle for the Medieval Magus

For *Ars Magica*

by Jeremiah Genest & Adam Bank

Aristotle, by Viatrix filia Boniface, Follower of Bonisagus

I never question the quaesitores. Nor should you, my pupil. Truly, Plato's writings show ingenuity, novelty of view, and a spirit of inquiry. But perfection in everything is perhaps a difficult thing, and more readily found in the blessed words of Aristotle.

Aristotle embodied the curious mind. He taught the world to cherish knowledge for its own sake. The practical application of "values" our Platonist brethren hold so dear is but one branch of human endeavor that Aristotle revealed to us. Through Aristotle, we can learn all the laws of nature and super nature; the components of the human mind and the body politic; the intricacies of poetics and rhetoric; and the very structure of logic and the universe.

Magi, monks, university magisters, and Popes alike look to Aristotle for all things, for centuries past and the years to come.

Logic

Logic, or "verbal reasoning," forms the basis of all understanding and inquiry, both mundane and magical. Verbal reasoning begins with "notions," or the words themselves. All individual notions belong to the following ten categories in order: substance, quantity, quality, relation, place, time, situation, condition, action, and passion.

Exempli grata: "A flower." First, inquire as to the notion's substance: "What is a flower?" Then, examine its quantity and quality: "How great is this flower?" Now relation: "What kind flower is this, how does it compare to others?" And so on.

Notions, when combined together, become propositions. Exempli grata -- a proposition that will become very important to you in time, I might add -- "This flower is vis." Propositions, not notions alone, express truth or falsehood. Let us hope, for the sake of the custo who plucked it for me, that our example proposition indeed possesses truth rather than falsity.

Now then, notions in combinations of propositions give rise to the syllogism, the basis of all rational speech and thought. To give the example my pater gave to me, and his mater gave to him, and back to our Order's own prime mover, Bonisagus himself: "All men are mortal; Socrates is a man; therefore, Socrates is mortal." This syllogism is true, because both propositions are true, and the conclusion derives logically from them.

"All men are mortal," alas. Perhaps, with our help, this proposition may some day become false instead of true.

Logic Against Plato

Religion and mysticism cannot satisfy the Aristotelian sense of wonder and curiosity. The first Greek sages, such as Anaximenes and Anaximander, philosophized on nature. The Pythagoreans reached beyond to mathematical and magical abstraction. Socrates and his progeny achieved a level of pure thought. For Aristotle, metaphysics concerns both the working of nature and the conditions of existence. Specifically, Aristotelian metaphysics deals with the fundamental state of existence.

Ask yourself, "what makes a thing exist? What things truly exist?" Plato answered: the Forms. The Forms exist as

universal elements of knowledge and existence. Other than the permanent Forms, only the constantly changing phenomena of perception exist.

Aristotle attacks Plato on three grounds.

First, the Theory of Forms cannot explain how matter changes. Matter moves, transforms, and eventually ceases to exist. The Forms, defined as permanent and unchangeable, therefore cannot be the source of change. Yet matter changes. Plato's Forms cannot be the foundation of existence, because they cannot carry out this fundamental function.

Second, the Theory of Forms cannot explain how we gain knowledge of a particular thing, like the color of this flower. To know something, one must possess knowledge of its substance. The Theory of Forms, however, places knowledge outside particular things. Knowledge would forever be "one step" away. "Emanations" may aid the mystic on the endless quest of enlightenment, but true philosophers reach answers to questions, the ends of investigations, and the knowledge of particulars. "This flower is red." Simple for Aristotle, impossible to Plato.

Third, the Theory of Forms cannot explain why particular objects exist at all. The Forms do not exist within particular objects, but particular objects somehow "partake" in their Forms. How can this flower's substance be separate from the flower itself? Plato answers with metaphors of "participation," but never adequately describes the relationship between the Form and the object. Once again, the permanent Form always lies "one step" away from the changing object. This so-called participation can never take place as Plato describes it.

Aristotle's Metaphysics

Existence is the passage from potentiality to actuality. Potential things become actual things through the process of cause and effect. Every actual object results from four causes: the material cause (the element out of which the object is created); the efficient cause (the means by which the object is created); the formal cause (the expression of the object); and the final cause (the end for which the object exists).

Exempli grata: this bronze statue, a gift from a friend of House Verditius. First, we begin with the obvious material cause, the raw material of the bronze, and the efficient cause, the sculptor himself. The formal cause is the idea of the completed statue, and the final cause is the idea of the completed statue as it urges the sculptor to sculpt. Although the final cause sublimates the formal cause, never confuse the two. The crucial final cause brings the bronze statue into objective existence. The final cause lies not in the mind of the sculptor, but in the statue itself. All of creation exists for a rational purpose. In a very true sense, everything in the universe has but one efficient cause. I refer of course to God, He of everlasting life and perfect blessedness, engaged in a never-ending contemplation of the universe He created. Despite our disdain for mystical nonsense, and our embrace of the study of the natural world, we Bonisagus are not so godless after all.

Natural Philosophy

There are two extreme states of existence: form without matter, and matter without form. Every object in universe lays somewhere in between, always moving toward one extreme or the other. Unlike the Platonists, I speak of actual movement, of the physics of motion.

Faerie communion? Embracing the Enigma? Awakening the heart-beast? These are distractions. Magic is movement. Movement is physics. Physics is Aristotle.

Movement makes time. Time is simply the observation of the motion of an object. If nothing ever moved, time would not exist. If no one ever watched something move, time would not exist. Time belongs to the Hermetic Art of Imáginem, in the form of the Eyes of the Past and variant spells. Time regards the perception of the eye, not the physics of the world. You cannot manipulate time. You can only make matter move.

Platonists and the Pythagoreans believe that all matter consists of jumbles of four geometrical atoms: tetrahedrons of Fire, cubes of Earth, octahedrons of Air, and icosahedrons of Water. Such a theory requires the existence of vacuum --

do you see why? But void, actual empty space, is impossible. "Just as every body is in place," wrote Aristotle, "every place has a body in it." Space is not a thing; it is the boundary between things. Space possesses neither matter nor form, and therefore cannot move. Thus, space lies beyond the purview of magic, making the study of regiones both fascinating and futile.

Now, then, combining all that we have so far discussed: causation, matter, form, and motion give rise to the universe, and logic permits the curious mind to examine it. Upon examination, the universe and all things in it present themselves in hierarchy. God crowns all hierarchies and provides the ultimate measure of all things, allowing the curious mind to construct the scale of being.

At the bottom of this scale lies inorganic matter, unorganized and soulless. Organization comes from life. To be "organized" means to possess internal organs. To be organized also means to possess a soul. Even the human soul equates to the organization of the human body.

Platonists divorce the soul from the body, as if you could examine a river without considering its riverbed or the lake that feeds it. Just as the rushing waters of a river give purpose to a riverbed, the soul gives purpose and meaning to the physical body. The soul presents the perfect expression of the body that contains it.

Ethics

All human activities and pursuits are means to particular ends. Like causes and effects, and all other things in the universe, human means and ends exist on a hierarchical scale. Just as God is the ultimate cause, all human endeavors culminate in an ultimate end, the final and best object of the pursuits of all mankind. This end, in a word, is happiness. The road to happiness, and the avoidance of unhappiness, embodies the entire study of ethics.

But what is happiness? Beginning with first principles: human happiness must comport with human nature. To appeal to our human nature, happiness must come from human experience. To originate in human experience, happiness must arise from activities that only humans, and no other species of life, engage in. Our final proposition: the one faculty unique to humanity is reason. Therefore, true happiness comes from living in accordance with the rigors of reason.

The faculty of appetite gives us our emotions and desires. The faculty of reason gives us the power to regulate our appetites. The proper, rational control of appetite forms the basis of moral virtue; improper control, either too much or too little, leads to vice. Just as either the excess or deficiency of gymnastic exercise is fatal to health, so to is excessive austerity and impulsive indulgence fatal to happiness.

There are many specific moral virtues, all carefully balanced between deficiency and excessive vices. Exempla grata: the virtue of modesty. Lack modesty, and one falls into the vice of shamelessness, but excessive modesty results in the vice of bashfulness. The crowning moral virtue, high-mindedness, an ideal self-respect, comes from the balance of all others, and enforces them once established. "Straight and narrow," indeed.

Aristotelian Moral Virtues as Personality Traits

Aristotle's theories of ethics provided the essential background for medieval notions of personality and behavior. The moral virtues can be used as character Personality Traits.

Vice of Deficiency	Virtuous Mean	Vice of Excess
Cowardice	Courage	Rashness
Insensibility	Temperance	Intemperance
Illiberality	Liberality	Prodigality
Pettiness	Munificence	Vulgarity

Humility	High-Mindedness	Vainglory
Apathy	Ambition	Hubris
Enervation	Good Temper	Irascibility
Ironical Depreciation	Sincerity	Boastfulness
Boorishness	Wittiness	Buffoonery
Shamelessness	Modesty	Bashfulness
Callousness	Just Resentment	Spitefulness

Commentary: Aristotle's Magic

In the mid-12th century, John of Toledo translated from Arabic the *Secretum Secretorum*, the "Secret of Secrets." The text contained letters allegedly written by Aristotle to Alexander the Great while the young emperor fought his Persian campaign. These letters contained Aristotle's esoteric secret teachings, given only to his intimate disciples.

The letters explained how to put philosophical understanding to practical use. One who understood the secrets of nature hidden therein could accomplish wonders. Couched in elusive, enigmatic terminology, this text captured the fancy and imagination of scholars throughout Europe.

The revealed knowledge of the *Secretum Secretorum* helped establish natural magic, an academic tradition of hedge magic whose practitioners hail from the universities and even the monasteries of the West (*Hedge Magic*, page 41).

Aristotle in the 13th Century

By 1278, most of Aristotle's entire corpus circulated throughout Western Europe, thanks to reconnection with the East and the diligent work of translators over a period of approximately 150 years. To the medieval scholar, for whom communication between centers of learning was rare and the modern notion of academic standards non-existent, the translator of a text became as important as the original author himself. While most Latin translations came from Greek texts, others came from Arabic, and even simple disagreements between translations of the same language led to widely different interpretations of the original works.

Before 1115, only the short *Categories* and *On Interpretations* were available in Latin translation by Boethius. Around 1150, James of Venice, while studying in Constantinople, translated Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics*, *Physics*, *On the Soul*, *Metaphysics*, and several minor texts. By 1200, others had translated works on ethics, natural philosophy, and logic. Around 1240, Robert Grosseteste translated the *Nicomachean Ethics* and *On the Heavens*. The Flemish translator William of Moerbeke rounded out the rest of the corpus between 1255 and 1278.

Eastern Learning in the Order

Soon after its founding, the Order of Hermes spread across Europe, giving magi the opportunity to access many Greek and Arabic texts lost to the Latin world. Covenants of the Iberian Tribunal, the Roman Tribunal and points further East obtain and translate many texts for their own study and for trade to the magi of the West. Beyond Plato and Aristotle, the commentaries and original work of Arabic philosophers interest many magi as new views on the cosmos and the fundamentals of magic.

Controversy

The rediscovery of Aristotle lead to an intellectual and religious crisis in the 13th century West, as university-taught Masters of Arts clashed with Church-taught theologians for the first time. In 1210, for example, theologians of Paris

campaigns against Aristotle's works on the nature of God, man, mortality, and the creation of the world. The provincial synod of Sens, led by archbishop Peter of Corbeil (once a university Master, now an official of the Church) banned the teaching of Aristotle on these subjects.

Concerns of forgery also plague this Aristotelian renaissance. Both the Order and the universities dispute the authenticity of many of the new books. Some regard the *Liber de Causis* of Proclus as a work of Aristotle, even though authorities such as Alain of Lille and William Moerbeke state otherwise. *De Mineralibus* and *De Sex Orincipiis* are two other examples of works that some attribute erroneously to Aristotle. The discovery of so many new sources meets with as much debate and uncertainty as enthusiasm.

The Aristotelian

Aristotelians are worldly, curious, questing students. To them, logic, mathematics, and magic are the means -- not the goal -- of understanding. Theory must be applied through experimentation and observation of the natural world and the stars above. Wisdom comes from close examination of the world around you and understanding how the principles of philosophy and magic apply to nature, the human mind, the human body, spirits, and angels.

Suggested Mystae Virtues: Astral Magic +4, Classical Training +3, Hermetic Alchemy +1, Hermetic Astrology +1, Vulgar Alchemy +2

Suggested Hermetic Virtues: Affinity with (Intéllego) + 4, Cyclic Magic (stellar), Enduring Magic +3, Free Study +1, Gentle Gift +1, Inventive Genius +1, Method Caster (variable), Promised Apprentice +1, Study Bonus +2

Suggested General Virtues: Learn from Mistakes +1, Weather Sense +1, Well-Traveled +1

Suggested Flaws: Cyclic Magic (stellar), Driving Goal -1, Meddler -1, Non-Spontaneity -6, Old (spent years in mundane studies) -3 Study Requirement -3

Suggested Abilities: Artes Liberales, Disputatio, Folk Ken, Philosophiae, Medicine, Scribe Arabic, Scribe Greek, Theology

Suggested Arts: Aristotelians are often generalists.

Bjornaer: The tradition of our house gives us unique abilities to explore the natural world. What better avenue to study and classify of all the species of nature than to live among them?

Bonisagus: The Founder of our house used Aristotle's methods to achieve breakthroughs rivaling the feats of the ancient wizards. If we challenge the world with our curiosity and questioning, Bonisagus' legacy will continue.

Criamon: The Enigma hides in the essential nature of all things. Study the world and its workings, and the Enigma will surely reveal itself to you.

Ex Miscellenea: The first of our lineages were simple scholars. The magic, resources, and collected knowledge of the Order give us opportunities of learning they could only dream of.

Flambeau: The light of wisdom is the greatest advantage we can have over an opponent. The curious mind reveals the weaknesses of others.

Guernicus: Logical, ethical laws are obeyed, while unjust, unreasoned laws are ignored-or worse-reviled and deliberately defied. With careful study, we can learn the best balance of virtues that leads to a harmonious Order.

Jerbiton: Society and governments succeed or fail according to the principles first expressed by Aristotle's *Politica*. With our subtle, invisible hand, we can guide the kingdoms of Europe along the path of virtue.

Mercere: Our house wanders through town, path, and wilderness. The information we collect on the road can prove

invaluable in the laboratory.

Merinita: Arcadia shines like a mirror of our world. By studying the faerie, we can learn great secrets regarding the essential nature of the cosmos.

Tremere: Aristotle tells us that all things belong in a hierarchy. Our Founder structured our house on that principle, and one day the entire Order will appreciate his wisdom.

Tytalus: The entire universe, from the heavenly spheres to the humblest insect, consists of a single game, built by God and operating according to rational rules. We can become great gamblers by learning from the Master.

Verditius: Unlike spontaneous magic and the wild spells of the faeries, the crafting of enchantments follows rigid and regular rules. Aristotle has taught us many of these rules; let us strive to discover more.

Aristotelian Mystic Companion

Aristotelian Template

Starting Abilities: Alchemy 3, Artes Liberales 4, Awareness 2, Magic Sensitivity 2, Philosophiae 4, Scribe Latin 3, Speak Latin 4, Speak Own Language 5

Starting Experience Points: 10 + age

Required Virtues: Alchemy +1, Educated +1, Magic Sensitivity +1

Secret of Secrets

Aristotelians possess incredible powers of deduction and observation. They know the Secret of Secrets: how to learn new Magical Affinities.

First, you must pick what Affinity you wish to learn. You must possess a Knowledge that deals with the Affinity's subject. An Affinity with Ghosts, for example, would require Occult Lore. Next, you must spend a season researching the subject. During your research, you must spend a number of pawns of vis equal to the Virtue cost of the Affinity x 5. The vis must be of a Form or Technique that relates to the subject. Studying an Affinity with Ghosts requires 5 pawns of Mentem vis, for example.

At the end of the season, roll as stress die + Int + appropriate Knowledge + aura. Divide the total by the Virtue cost of the Affinity and add that many experience points to your score in the Affinity. If this is your first season studying the Affinity, your score in the Affinity before the roll is effectively 0. You can study a single Affinity a number of times equal to your score in the appropriate Knowledge.

Your Affinities allow you to work magic. You can purchase hedge magic Virtues, modified and discounted, explained below. You cannot work any magic, however, unless you first possess the appropriate Affinity at a positive score. Add your Affinity scores to any appropriate magic total.

Aristotelian Magic Virtues

You may purchase any of these Virtues during character creation. If your Saga contains Mystic Companions from *Hedge Magic*, you may take up to +8 Virtue points worth of Aristotelian Magic Virtues at no cost with the approval of the troupe and storyguide. Troupes and storyguides may also decide that that Charioteers can initiate these Virtues as well.

Affinities (varies): Same as Hermetic Magical Affinities, *ArM4* page 34. You cannot work magic without purchasing

an Affinity during character creation or learning one in play.

Vulgar Transformations (+1): You can perform transformations as the natural magicians do (***Hedge Magic***, page 41), as long as you have an Affinity related to the substance to transform.

Philosophic Transformations (+2): As per Philosophic Alchemy (The Mysteries). You must have an Affinity related to the substance transformed. You can also create longevity potions if you learn an Affinity in Longevity (+1).

Natural Enchantments (+2): You can create enchantments as natural magicians do (***Hedge Magic***, page 43) as long as you have an Affinity related to the effect instilled.

Astral Charms and Banes (+3): You must first learn an Affinity with Astrology (+1) before acquiring this Virtue. You can craft charms and banes as cunning folk do (***Hedge Magic***, page 37), with the following differences: because your charms and banes are based on astrology, your formula to craft a charm or bane is stress die + Int + Affinity with Astrology + Artes Liberales + aura. If you learn an Affinity with Curses (+2) you may add your Affinity score when crafting banes. If you learn an Affinity with Blessings (+2), you may add your Affinity score when crafting charms. Finally, you must use raw vis instead of wild vis when creating greater charms and banes.

Natural Spellcrafting (+3): You can create spell assemblages just as the natural magicians do (***Hedge Magic***, page 42) as long as you have an Affinity with the spell effect created. You cannot use a number of pawns of vis greater than your Affinity score when creating an assemblage.

Pre-Industrial Measurements in Gaming

by Brian Rogers

"Turning the corner, the passageway opens up before you. Your torches dance madly in the fetid breeze, and only Drunar's lantern gives steady illumination. As his beam plays back and forth you hear the skittering sounds of dozens of roaches fleeing the unexpected light, taking cover in the cracks of the distant fungus covered walls."

"Cool! How big is the room?"

"25 feet by 40 feet, with a 10 foot by 10 foot alcove 15 feet along the north wall."

Well that blew the imagery all to heck. It's a never-ending problem when mapping -- the game runs faster if the GM is clear on the dimensions, but too much precision drags players into meta-game discussions of length and width. One solution is using uncommon terms of measurement. We didn't standardize measurement until technology required it, and in doing so we eliminated or marginalized several day-to-day units of measure. Most fantasy worlds haven't reached those tech levels, so such measurements would still be commonplace, giving the GM a way to be specific without breaking the fourth wall.

The Body as a Ruler

Everyone knows that the foot originated in the measurement of, well, the human foot. Most of our other English measurements also originate in the human body; after all, it was the one thing people could depend on having with. The ones still in common use are the foot and the yard (the distance of a man's sternum to the tip of his fingers), but people developed many similar measurements for conversion to a fantasy setting.

First, lets tackle the ones in limited use today: the hand and the fathom. The hand is the distance from a man's thumb to his pinkie across his palm, measuring about 4 inches. It survives today only among horse lovers, and that's where it would be most in a fantasy game -- horses run from 14.2 to 20 hands at the withers (from hoof to shoulder), with ponies traditionally being anything smaller and draft horses being anything larger. With that as a scale, you can impress players with 19-hand-high Orkish war horses or dainty 12-hand-high Elvish mounts. The fathom, still in use a nautical depth, originally meant the distance between fingertips with arms outstretched (the word comes from Anglo-Saxon for embrace). Logically, this makes a fathom equal to two yards, or six feet.

Two more are the digit and the span. A digit's width is the base of a man's pointer finger, and a span is the distance between thumb and fingertip with the fingers outstretched. While they might not seem useful they fill some gaps, specifically in replacing the inch. The inch is not a bodily measurement -- the word 'inch' is Latin for 'a twelfth,' developed as a convenient division of the foot -- and we may discard it to stick with strict body measurement. In that case, the digit replaces the inch, as the two are close in length (actually, the digit is three quarters of an inch).

Finally, there's the pace and the mile (yes, the mile is a bodily measurement -- bear with me). The pace is the distance of two steps, which works out to being slightly over 5 feet. The word 'mile' comes, again, from Latin: Romans measured distance based on the paces of their marching legions, and a thousand paces was a milia passuum. This was shorted to milia, which became the English mile. So why isn't our mile 5000 feet? Well, "slightly over" adds up when multiplied by a thousand, which is why our mile is 5,280 feet.

Non-bodily Distances

While the body works for many measurements, there are some things it can't do. For adventurers, this means using two new measurements: the reach and the pole. Both of these require agreed upon standards, but both are handy concepts

for the average dungeon delver.

A reach is traditionally the distance between a man's upstretched hand and his feet, standardized at 8 feet. Conveniently, that's the length of weapons like the halberd & long spear ("reach" weapons in *D&D*), so many adventurers have a reach comparison on hand. A pole is a standardized at 10 feet. Most likely a carpenter's tool, it is easily available for heroes seeking long sticks to poke ahead for traps.

(It should be noted that these did not exist in our world. While there is an uncommon measure called a "pole," it is synonymous with a rod, measuring 5.5 yards and used when calculating acreage. Given the gaming histories of "rods" and "10-foot poles," it felt comfortable redefining the pole and ignoring the rod entirely.)

Weighty Matters

While the body isn't useful as a measurement of mass, there are plenty of uncommon terms out there. In fact, there are several standards for mass, making the issue of how much something weighs a confusing process. Without the body as a baseline, Europe developed a variety of measurement systems, two of which took hold in England -- the Troy system (for precious metals and medicines) and the Avoirdupois system (used for large goods, such as wagons of grain). The latter is the basis for the current English system, but the Troy scale was acknowledged as being more accurate, especially for small weights; this article borrows from the Avoirdupois system for larger weights and the Troy system for smaller ones.

(Again, a small note: while these systems both use pound and ounce as measures, they ascribe different masses to them. An Avoirdupois ounce is 10% smaller than the Troy ounce, but has 16 ounces in a pound rather than 12 -- making the Avoirdupois pound 20% larger. In addition, apothecaries modified the Troy weights, producing yet more measurements. For simplicity's sake we're not paying much attention to the actual weights, instead going for the medieval feel for the terms.)

When dealing with things heavier than a pound, you can use the English system's stone and quarter. Without the body as a baseline people used commonplace objects for comparisons: the stone is based on the weight of a large stone, standardized at 14 pounds. A quarter is equal to two stones, or one fourth of a hundredweight. (Contrary to logic, a hundredweight is 112 pounds. The American system ignores stone and quarter, setting the hundredweight at 100 pounds -- it's therefore less useful for our purposes.) These terms can be casually applied to any large weight, such as people or piles of treasure.

When dealing with smaller masses, we have a variety of terms measured against common objects. The smallest is the grain, equal to one grain of wheat or barley. Twelve of those made up a carat, which was the weight of a small bean. Two carats was a pennyweight, or the weight of a common coin. There were 20 pennyweights in an ounce.

Another unit of mass was the mark, set at 12 pennyweights, or 24 carats. If you're curious, the mark was a standard gold coin. Since gold was mixed with other metals to make it hard enough to use as currency, the purity of the coin was measured in how many carats out of the 24 were actually gold -- a coin that was 3/4 gold was identified as 18 carats. If the GM wants to deal with differing masses for coins, having a large gold piece weigh twelve times as much as a small copper penny is a good place to start.

Apothecaries added two more useful terms: the scruple and the dram. The scruple was set at 20 grains, and the dram at 3 scruples. Scruple is a Latin word for "small stone," while dram is most likely based on the Greek coin drachma, giving the GM a third coin-based measurement.

Measurements in Game

All of this may be interesting, but what practical value does it have for gaming? Non-standard measurements emphasize primitive tech levels, as the characters are limited by what they can touch, reach, walk or compare against when making judgements.

Bodily measurements are very easy for people to eyeball or determine by taking a few steps or laying their hand on something. The digit, hand and span give everyday terms for 1, 4, and 8 inches, likely divisions for merchants. The pace, slightly more than 5 feet, can represent a *D&D* grid square, a *Fantasy HERO* hex or two *GURPS* hexes, letting the GM give distances in game without multiples of feet (or worse, hexes or squares). At two yards, the *Fantasy HERO* hex is more accurately a fathom, but people may balk at using a measurement for depth when describing distance. The pole and reach are based on things adventurers have on hand, making them almost as useful as the body in the adventuring environment.

Systems of mass have a direct impact on commerce, and therefore on travel. Communities become trading centers only when they have reliable and rigorously enforced measurements. Guilds push for such rigorous standard, while individual guild members skirt the system for their own benefit. The term "baker's dozen" for 13 stems from bakers ensuring their they met the strict weight quotas -- the penalty for missing quotas being far worse than the loss of profit in giving extra goods to customers. If the rules were that stringent for bakers, they're likely worse for things adventurers deal in, such as precious metals or spell components. As Matt Riggsby pointed out in his article on food "[Guess Who's Coming To Dinner?: Food in Roleplaying Games](#)" (*Pyramid* 2/23/01), there were no cookbooks before standardized measurement. If cooking was difficult, imagine the trouble in preparing potions! Then make that an order of magnitude worse if wizards are possessive of their secrets.

Cities without enforced standards are places where merchants prey on the unwary, and can be good places to separate the PCs from extra cash. This might give them a new group of enemies to revenge themselves upon, provide a reason for moving on, or both. Of course, such cities will have poor reputations among travelling merchants, giving connected heroes some forewarning.

Measuring Adventure Hooks

- **Does the Polymorph potion need Viennese or Parisian drams?:** The PCs recover an alchemical text, then have to steal a rival college's measurement standards to make use of it. Using the book without the proper measurements can create any number of adventure-generating mishaps as magic goes awry.
- **The Long Yard of the Law:** The characters are hired to enforce standards against the wishes of the local merchants. In addition to exposing the cons and protecting the unwary buyers, the PC's will have to deal with the guild's legbreakers or bribes while pursuing their task. The guild might have legitimate complaints -- the Lord making the pound heavier but keeping prices constant -- which makes separating desperate merchants from the truly guilty much harder.
- **Confiscated for not meeting standards!?:** The PCs bring the haul from the ancient tomb into town and are promptly arrested for using gold that doesn't meet new purity standards. It doesn't matter that the coins were minted there a century ago, a magistrate has his eyes on the gold and is using the standards as a means to take it. The PCs have to get out of town to avoid a jail sentence or whipping, then contrive how to get their money back.

Bibliography

- Asimov, Isaac. *The Realm of Measure*. 1960, Houghton Mifflin Company Boston: This is a wonderful book if you can find a copy of it -- Asimov starts with the measurements I discuss here and works his way to the theory of relativity, all in a clean, conversational style.

How Many? A Dictionary of Units and Measurement (www.unc.edu/~rowlett/units): Russ Rowlett's excellent resource on measurements, both old and new. Highly recommended.

Encyclopedia Britannica. (www.britannica.com): Referenced here for both measurement and horses, it's one of the web's best general resources.

Slaves Only to Death

A 19th Century Deadworld for the *All Flesh Must Be Eaten*

by Dylan Craig

It started with slave ships. Of course, they'd been illegal for years. Britain had outlawed the Atlantic slave trade in the thirties; but, enterprise will out, and the ships just grew leaner, faster, and better at dumping their cargoes at the first sight of a British man-of-war. I understand it was a lucrative trade, back then; plenty of respectable patricians had a 'blackbird' or two hidden deep in their account ledgers, providing a little side income for a rainy day.

*My friends in the clergy say that it all came down to sin; that the desperate pleading of thousands of oppressed souls and the inhuman cruelty of the men who transported them, moved almighty God himself to reach out His vengeful hand. Myself? Well, **semper novus ex Africa**, as they say. I don't know whether it was heathen witchcraft or some undiscovered tropical disease that started the whole affair. Whatever the case, it was a freighter named the **Charon** that brought it to our shores.*

*The **Charon** ran aground in Cuba. Apparently, she'd been adrift for days, her crew wiped out to a man -- but details are, of course, fairly sketchy given what followed. We used to keep a keen eye on Cuba, even then, and on a clear day in Miami, they say you could see Havana burning. Our navy was loading up to sail over there and investigate, but the whole thing was pretty delicate with the Spanish refusing to allow any foreign warship within visual range of the Cuban coast. Folks were predicting that it would end up with us at war with the Spanish -- and about time too -- when Miami started to burn, too. Whatever Cuba had "caught," it seemed we had it too. Well, Miami's not as isolated as Havana, and the news of what exactly had happened spread pretty quickly. The walking dead were loose, and wiping out every living human they could find.*

*Well, as it turned out, not **every** human. Blacks were pretty safe, so long as they didn't make any sudden moves or raise a weapon against the undead. But Indians, whites, Chinese, mulattos -- well, they were fair game, and though it was a hard fight, we lost Miami pretty quickly. The army was being mobilized, and was setting up to retake Florida, when the Zombies attacked to the north and west, and another of those damn slaveships sailed into Boston harbor, casual as you please, with a living crew and an undead cargo. We almost lost Boston; as it was, a lot of people died before the last Zombie was laid low.*

What can I say? We weren't ready for war against the living dead. We were just getting the upper hand in our land squabble with Mexico, so we had plenty of soldiers and materials, but the experienced troopers were down in Texas, and the green recruits we had on the East coast were more likely to curl into a ball and start crying when they saw a Zombie than to give fire like they'd been taught. We lost city after city; Atlanta burned for days while we tried to break through the encircling hordes and free the civilians trapped inside. In the end, all we found were more Zombies. We held the line at Washington, and the Texans did their bit to hold the Zombies a hundred or so miles from Austin; in the interior, the Apaches and Sioux did some of our work for us, dropping rockfalls on the Zombie columns and putting bullets into the big Zombies they call Spitters, like our sharpshooters have learned to do now. But by and large, we lost the South. Britain, France, and Germany were falling over themselves to help us -- in exchange for land grants or money, of course -- but pretty soon they were

finding slaveships trying to get to their own coastlines too. Those Brits know how to run a navy, and they sent dozens of those hulks to the bottom of the Atlantic, but one or two must have gotten through because pretty soon, the Zombies were turning up on their side of the table as well.

Has it been two years? It's hard to believe. Some people say the tide is turning; the British military government under Wellington is boasting that Edinburgh will be liberated by Christmas. Their Boer mercenary allies in South Africa took Cape Town last month; with the port back in operation, the plan is to ship Sikh reinforcements by the thousand to the European theater, and that ought to change things around a bit. As for us; well, we're holding steady. Had to move the seat of government up to Philadelphia, of course, but it doesn't seem to have slowed things down much. President Finchley's reelection motto was 'Take it Back!', and you see those words everywhere these days; on buttons, stitched into flags, and on posters.

Take it back? Sounds good to me. But I wonder if it will be that simple. You see, some of the slaves that made it out of the South -- and there aren't many, let me tell you; they run a tight ship down there -- have terrifying stories to tell. The Zombies didn't do any liberating when they took over; the slaves have to work twice as hard now, and if they drop dead in the fields, well, they'll be back on their feet in a few hours. The cotton and produce all goes to New Orleans, where ships with living crews -- the same degenerate pirates and corsairs who crewed the Boston ship -- take the cargo on board, for sale on the black market. Prices for commodities like that are high these days, the world situation being what it is. Now, those ships shouldn't be getting past our naval blockade, but they do; perhaps the number of ships who've been overrun by Zombies swimming alongside and climbing up onto the decks has given our Navy captains a strong taste for discretion.

The slaves also say every third person in New Orleans is alive, and they aren't just talking about other slaves. Who are these folks? Why are they in league with the Zombies? Who is at the top, calling the shots? And where -- tell me, where -- is all the money going?

Yes, it started with slave ships. But what scares me is where it will end.

Slaves Only to Death Zombies					
The Shackled		The Vengeful		Spitters	
Str: 2	Dex: 1	Str: 4	Dex: 2	Str: 7	Dex: 1
Con: 2	Int: -2	Con: 2	Int: 0	Con: 2	Int: -2
Per: 2	Wil: 2	Per: 1	Wil: 2	Per: 1	Wil: 2
DPs: 26	Ess: 6	DPs: 10	Ess: 6	DPs: 15	Ess: 6
Spd: 2	Pow: 11	Spd: 4	POW: 35	Spd: 2	POW: 33
Attack: Brawling 2, Bite		Attack: Brawling 2, Bite		Attack: Brawling 2, Bite	
Weak Spot: All		Weak Spot: Eyes (+9)		Weak Spot: Guts (+3)	

<p>Getting Around: Slow and Steady, Aquatic</p> <p>Strength: Dead Joe Average</p> <p>Senses: Like the Living</p> <p>Sustenance: Weekly; All Flesh Must Be Eaten</p> <p>Intelligence: Dumb as Dead Wood</p> <p>Spreading the Love: Only the Dead</p> <p>Special Features: Flammable Blood (1)</p>	<p>Getting Around: Life-Like</p> <p>Strength: Strong Like Bull</p> <p>Senses: Like the Dead</p> <p>Sustenance: Daily, Soul Sucker</p> <p>Intelligence: Language, Animal Cunning (+2), Teamwork</p> <p>Spreading the Love: One Bite and You're Hooked</p> <p>Special Features: Flammable Blood (2)</p>	<p>Getting Around: Slow and Steady</p> <p>Strength: Monstrous Strength, Damage Resistant, Fire Resistant (3)</p> <p>Senses: Like the Dead</p> <p>Sustenance: Daily, Intestines</p> <p>Intelligence: Dumb as Dead Wood</p> <p>Spreading the Love: Only the Dead</p> <p>Special Features: Spitter (3), Spew Flame (4), Explosive Personality (5)</p>
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Zombie Notes

- In the case of the *Eyes* vulnerability, attacks aimed specifically at the eye region are at between -6 and -8 to hit. However, any attack hitting the head region has a 1 in 4 chance of hitting the eyes.
- The *Guts* vulnerability requires an Attack roll at -2 to exploit.
- *Flammable Blood* is treated exactly like *Acid Blood*. The blood bursts into flame when exposed to substances other than the zombie's own tissues.

Zombie Creation

The cadavers of persons who died in bondage always rise to as *the Vengeful*, irrespective of cause of death. All others rise as the kind of Zombie that had the most active hand in slaying them.

Story Ideas

- **The Underground Railroad:** The characters are slaves on a Southern plantation, who cannot bear the cruel rulership of the Zombies and their human associates any longer. There are a few brave souls whose specialty is ferrying escaped slaves North, but the price will be high, and fearsome obstacles stand between the characters and their freedom. With slave-catchers close on their heels, and slaving undead to all sides, the characters have only one option; go forward or die.
- **Quarantine:** Australia, India, and Her Majesty's other Eastern possessions are among the few lands on earth which have been spared exposure to the Zombie attacks. Now, a slave-ship packed with the groaning dead has been seen rounding Cape Horn en route to the island chains of the Eastern Pacific. Should these areas become infected, all of Asia could follow. Several US Navy ships have set sail from San Francisco to meet and sink the

slaver, but with thousands of miles of ocean to be covered, and countless islands offering shelter to the quarry, it is indeed a daunting task.

- **Mardi Dead:** The strange goings-on in New Orleans can be ignored no longer. Disguised as smugglers, the characters must enter the City of the Dead to investigate (and, if possible, eliminate) the cabal of pirates who are colluding with the Zombie hordes. In the course of this investigation, the characters encounter the Zombie Queen herself, a powerful necromancer from a secret African kingdom. Deathless and quite insane, she will not rest until every drop of slave blood has been washed away by a hundred drops from the veins of the oppressors. The Queen has something special planned for Mardi Gras; will the characters choose to return to safety, their mission fulfilled, or will they stay on to try and foil her schemes?

Pyramid Review

Rappan Athuk, The Dungeon of Graves: The Upper Levels (for d20)

Written by Bill Webb and Clark Peterson

Published by [Necromancer Games](#)

40 pg; \$9.99

The *d20* system added numerous elements to the *Dungeons & Dragons* game that promote roleplaying over roll-playing, such as a wider range of non-combative skills, the addition of feats, and the ability to customize characters with non-class skills. Now *D&D* gamers can play a paladin with a roguish past (and accompanying skills) or a wizard who is an expert with a sword. Paradoxically, the same rules revision has brought about a return to the unapologetic "dungeon crawl," that most sacred of Munchkin adventures. The editors at Wizards said that "one of the goals of 3rd Edition is to take the D&D game 'back to the dungeon' (*Dungeon* #83, p. 168)." *The Sunless Citadel* and *The Forge of Fury*, the first two official *Dungeons & Dragons* adventures from Wizards of the Coast, certainly bear that philosophy out. But not until *Rappan Athuk: The Dungeon of Graves* has the 3rd Edition dungeon crawl been embraced with such glee.

*"Why is the dungeon there? No one knows. Why do the monsters usually fight rather than talk? We aren't really sure. Why are there 16 trolls in a cave with a **jug of alchemy**? No one cares. What do all of the monsters eat? We don't know that either (although adventurer probably tops the menu). And we don't have to know these things. This isn't an ecology experiment; it's a dungeon—the quintessential setting for pure sword-and-sorcery adventuring!"*
--from the Introduction

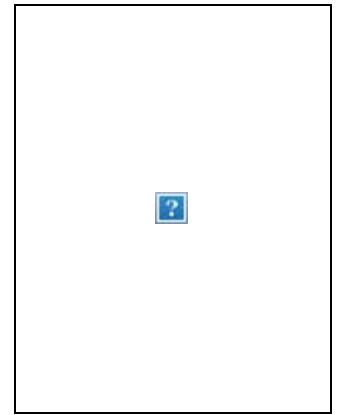
Rappan Athuk is, not surprisingly, a dungeon crawl in its purest (or basest) form. There is little logic, rhyme or reason to it, although there is a fair amount of cunning. Just as the Introduction promises, it's a dungeon and the authors make no apologies for this fact.

"THIRD EDITION RULES, FIRST EDITION FEEL." So reads the slogan of Necromancer Games. In most ways they live up to this claim, but in some minor ways they fall sadly short. The most obvious structural similarity is the way they use a combination letter-numeral designation for the series (in the case of *The Upper Levels* this is R1) in the upper left corner of the cover. This is a nice throw-back to the first edition modules and will prove useful as an easy way to keep numerous adventure products organized, once Necromancer has produced enough modules for this to matter. Wizards of the Coast could take a hint from this. WotC's core *D&D* adventures would be more easily identifiable as such if they still used the series designations.

Unfortunately, Necromancer has not adopted the First Edition tradition of printing maps on the inside cover of the module. Instead they put them in the center of the book, which isn't a terrible place for them, but it isn't exactly convenient either. A shrink-wrapped module with a detached cover would have been a nice touch of nostalgia as well, although opinions may vary widely as to whether these were ever a good idea or not. The artwork is considerably better than in the modules ancestors but the maps are actually worse. They are poorly drawn, too small and they don't include a grid . . . a strange oversight for a system that stresses maps and figures as much as *d20* does.

(SPOILER ALERT!)

The adventure is actually organized less like a First Edition module and more like the original *Diablo* computer game . . . but with a lot more traps. There is a vertical descent of rooms and corridors beneath an old mausoleum, with each



lower level generally tougher than the last. Much like *Diablo*, experienced adventurers can take a passage from the Ground Level to Level 3 or another from Level 1 straight to Level 9 (do not pass Go, do not collect 200 gold pieces). This will be useful for high level adventurers who want to start *Rappan Athuk* at a more challenging level, once all three products in the series are available. Until then, be wary of players who try to force their ways into the Middle and Lower levels. A vicious DM might slip in a few extra death traps at those points of egress; however, the players won't necessarily notice a difference.

Survival in *Rappan Athuk* is not a sure thing by any stretch of the imagination. Before even entering the dungeon the players will encounter an Instant Death Trap that would make Grimtooth proud. Furthermore, Level 1 centers around an utterly disgusting original creature, "The Dung Monster," which is not only exactly what it sounds like but is also quite deadly and effectively indestructible . . . on Level 1!

If the pun can be excused, it is downhill for the adventurers from there. The subsequent levels sporadically increase in complexity and lethality; the module unfortunately suffers from an a case of schizophrenia in its encounter ratings. Level 2 is made up of mostly CR6 encounters with several lower than that and one — the boss -- much higher (CR11). Level 3, which is called "Beware of Purple Worms" (this is really not much of a spoiler; the entrance to the level features a carving that says, "beware of purple worms"), contains encounters that range from CR1 to CR12. Similarly, Level 3A bottoms out at CR1/2 and peaks at CR13, while Level 4 is mostly CR5-6 with a couple of CR7s and one CR9. This disparity can either cause powerful groups to lose their minds to ennui fighting dire rats or weaker groups to become food for worms very quickly.

For the most part, Rappan Athuk lives up to Necromancer's unapologetic claims of pure Crawl. However, a few clever background stories and the occasional insidious plot do worm their ways into the mix. The purple worm level even includes elements of "an ecology experiment" in the form of rules for how killing too many of one type of monster will affect the level's food chain. While the authors should be suitably flogged for allowing such fluff into their Crawl, these pesky plot elements do little to derail the adventure.

(END SPOILER ALERT)

Online support for *Rappan Athuk* is excellent, if a bit quirky. For instance, the title page of the module promises a bonus download for "veterans" (read: old school *AD&D* players) who can identify the "main male monster associated with the phrase: 'Encounter R2-47.'" Without spoiling the answer (Necromancer Games does this itself on their website, for the sake of younger players and those without eidetic memories), the source is a very old but infamous 1st Edition *AD&D* module. Odds are that only gamers who DMed the module in question, or who re-read old modules for the sake of nostalgia, will have a chance of answering the question (note that the password is case sensitive). Still, it is a clever and somewhat refreshing approach and since Necromancer has provided the answer, no one is left out.

Both the secret and the standard downloads are high quality Adobe files that definitely add to the game. With a total of 25 pages combined, these downloads significantly increase the value of this product, which, at \$9.99 for 48 pages, is a bargain already. The standard download includes a map and a series of wilderness encounters, in case the DM wants to make her players work at finding the Dungeon of Graves, rather than just transport them there. The bonus download is a fairly straightforward combat encounter with some excellent flavor text and background information consistent with the original encounter that inspired its password.

On the whole, *Rappan Athuk* is an entertaining adventure supplement that munchkins and dungeon-crawlers will enjoy time and again (as most of the encounters re-spawn, return visits can continue indefinitely). Game Masters who like to work modules into the storylines of existing campaigns will be hard-pressed to do so with this adventure; it is far more suited to one-shots and nights of gratuitous violence than extended stories and roleplaying.

In terms of bang-for-the-buck, *Rappan Athuk* is a worthy buy. Realizing its true potential, however, may require some patience. It is clear that the Necromancer's R-Series isn't as suited for *Dungeons & Dragons* as it is for Kenzer & Company's upcoming *Hackmaster, 4th Edition*. With what will likely prove to be some very simple conversions, the Hack-factor for *Rappan Athuk* in Hackmaster should be through the roof. Hoody-frickin'-hoo!

--Neal Byles

Pyramid Review

Return to the Temple of Elemental Evil (for Dungeons & Dragons)

Published by [Wizards of the Coast](#)

Written by Monte Cook

Illustrated by Brom & David Roach

192 b&w pages, 16 page color map insert; \$29.95

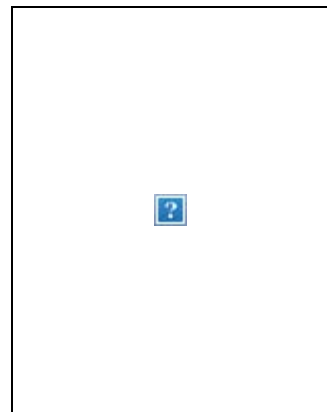
As part of their twenty-fifth anniversary, TSR revisited some of its first edition *AD&D* and *Basic D&D* adventures with the silver-covered *Return to . . .* modules, notably *Return to White Plume Mountain* and *Return to The Keep on the Borderlands*. Each of these revised, expanded, and explained the originals, even adding depth, enabling those who had played them the first time around to enjoy them once again. Of course, these were for second edition *AD&D*, so DMs wanting to run them using the Third Edition will have a certain amount of work to adapt them across. Now WotC have got in on the concept and released a complete Third Edition campaign with *Return to the Temple of Elemental Evil*.

Written by Monte Cook, *Return to the Temple of Elemental Evil* is based upon *The Temple of Elemental Evil* campaign book by Gary Gygax and Frank Mentzer, itself an oddity among TSR's 1st Edition campaign books. Almost all of these compilations were collections of classic module series. Thus the A series was compiled as A1-4, *Aerie of the Slave Lords*, and the G, D and Q series was rereleased as GDQ1-7, *Queen of the Spiders*. Gygax's Dungeon Module T1, *The Village of Hommlet* first appeared in 1979. An introductory scenario designed as the first of two modules, its sequel, T2, *The Temple of Elemental Evil* never appeared; instead in 1985, T1 was expanded into *T1-4 The Temple of Elemental Evil*, a campaign adventure intended to take characters from first to eighth level.

Return to the Temple of Elemental Evil (RttToEE), designed to take characters from fourth through to fourteenth level, is a 192-page book well laid out in black and white. The Brom cover is decent and gives nothing away about the contents. David Roach solely illustrates the interior, giving it a uniform look reminiscent of many First Edition books, although his smaller pieces are better than those used to illustrate full pages. Like T1-4, the maps have been put together in an insert at the back of the book. Here though they are not in black and white, but rendered in gorgeous color and detail by Todd Gamble. Throughout, boxed sidebars provide supplementary information and suggest ways in which that particular section of the campaign can be enhanced or expanded upon. Usefully, each of the sidebars is included in the book's table of contents.

The setting for *RttToEE* is the World of Greyhawk, between Veluna and the Duchy of Ulek, and centred upon the village of Hommlet. Twenty-five years ago a great darkness arose to threaten the area, operating from the Temple of Elemental Evil and very near the village. The forces of good banded together to defeat their evil opponents at the Battle of Emridy Meadows and were thought vanquished. Some nine years later, attempts were made to restore the broken Temple, but through the efforts of small bands of adventurers these were thwarted and the evil finally put a stop to. It is these later events that were chronicled through playing T1 and T1-4. Now fifteen years later, the peaceful village of Hommlet has grown in prosperity and worked hard to put the village's dark history behind it. Yet just as it did before, the evils behind the Temple is stirring and working to reclaim what is theirs.

The first major aspect that *RttToEE* expands is the background, explaining the force behind the Temple and the extent of its influence. This is the dark god Tharizdun, a deity so destructive that all of the other gods banded together to



imprison him away from the Prime Material Plane. Excised from history, Tharizdun has been working for aeons to free himself and has acquired a small cult dedicated to his aims. For centuries members of this secret cult have been hiding behind a religion known as Elemental Evil, which has worked its way into other dark faiths, notably those of the demon-spider queen Lolth, the demon, Zuggtmoy and even the old one, Iuz. In this way *Return to the Temple of Elemental Evil* is connected to the events of other classic Greyhawk adventures - GDQ1-7, *Queen of the Spiders* and WG4, *The Forgotten Temple of Tharizdun*.

The whole of the campaign is made up of eight chapters divided into three parts. The first part describes Hommllet and the surrounding area in three chapters. These revisit the village, its evil counterpart of Nulb, and the Temple's outpost of the Moathouse, as well as the ruined Temple of Elemental Evil. All of this is a revised update of the locations in T1 and T1-4, although the extensive dungeons below the Temple are all destroyed bar a few levels that are only being made accessible through the restorative efforts of the Elemental Evil's faithful.

In retracing the steps of the original adventurers, the party discovers clues to another temple to the southwest in the Lortmil Mountains. Described over the next three chapters, this is the Temple of All-Consumption: a large complex within the water filled crater of an extinct volcano. Running completely through the crater ridge are the Crater Ridge Mines, which contain four smaller temples, each devoted to one of the elements: air, earth, fire, and water. At the center of the crater are the Outer Fane and the Inner Fane, the very home to the leaders of the cult worshipping Tharizdun. The final two chapters leads the characters back to the Temple of Elemental Evil and the recently opened dungeons below it. Here with any luck, they can put an end to the cult's plans to unleash the elemental evil forces that would weaken the prison walls holding Tharizdun.

RttToEE is rounded out with four appendices. The first details the campaign's new magical items, artefacts and monsters, including four new swords each keyed to a particular element and a new creature in the form of the Half-Elemental. This comes about as the result of a union between a mortal creature and an elemental, or from the direct infusion of elemental power into a mortal at their birth. The second appendix explains the worship of Tharizdun and introduces the new domains of Force and Madness, as well as the prestige class for the deity's most elite worshippers, the Doomdreamer. All of the stats of the campaign's NPCs and major monsters are given in the third appendix, although minor creatures encountered have just their hit points given in the location description, with further reference to the *Monster Manual* a necessity. The final appendix gives a short explanation of the two handouts provided with the campaign.

Where there may be a problem with *RttToEE* is in getting the party to the starting point of Hommllet to begin the campaign. Several suggestions are given, but they are not particularly strong ones and the DM should instead devise one of their own, especially if they want to weave *RttToEE* into their own campaign. Of course, with a big campaign like this a fair amount of effort is required to run it successfully, but this should not put off the DM as it is far from excessive and the course of the campaign is quite linear.

What you have in *Return to the Temple of Elemental Evil* is a large and detailed dungeon bash, which is no surprise given its heritage. Indeed for a dungeon bash, this is very much an improvement upon the original T1 and T1-4. Yet in its construction it does resemble the onionskin model exemplified by many of Chaosium's *Call of Cthulhu* campaign packs. That is no bad thing for what is a well-written and solid adventure that will offer months of heroic gaming against a dark and evil foe to any group of players. For the DM it offers all that, and greater value for money than many of Wizard of the Coast's most recent releases.

-- *Matthew Pook*

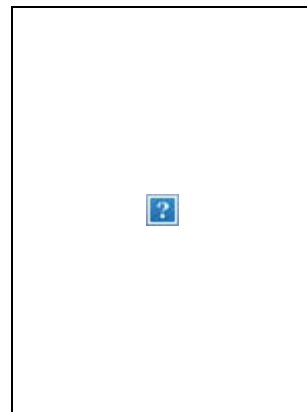
Pyramid Review

The Great Rail Wars Miniatures Battle Game

Published by [Pinnacle Entertainment Group](#)

Written by **Shane Hensley**

144 pages; \$25.00



The Great Rail Wars Miniature Battles Game, written by Pinnacle Entertainment Group's Shane Hensley, is the second edition rules for the popular miniatures branch of the *Deadlands* line. Players deploy enforcers from the Bayou Vermillion, Black River, Dixie Rails, Iron Dragon, Union Blue, and Wasatch Railroads or the forthcoming Army of Lost Angels, the Mexican Army, and Indian forces, and fight over treasure and territory in the Weird West. The miniatures for these forces are available in both boxed sets and as individual units, although the latter will only be available at a future date via the Pinnacle web site. The rules are easily understood and play well. While proofreading errors will make some of the more advanced material, especially the spell lists, difficult to navigate, these rules are sound and enjoyable.

The Great Rail Wars allows you to command both posses of troops (five figures each) or single figures in battles set in Pinnacle's *Weird West* setting. Those unfamiliar with this setting will find a brief but solid introduction in the first portion of the rulebook with more than enough information to play the game. In brief, the technology level is a blending of the Civil War and World War One through the use of steampunk technology. In addition, magic has returned to the world, and the creatures of nightmare with it. The individual armies vary in their use of technology and magic, allowing each army to maintain its own unique flavor. Wasatch, for example, depends heavily upon mad science while Union Blue and Dixie Rails use line units from the Federal and Confederate armies. Black River and Bayou Vermillion are heavily magical while Iron Dragon fields martial artists from the Far East.

The mechanics of the game are simple without being simplistic. For any given task, the player attempts to roll a 4 or an 8, depending on whether or not the range is short or long or the task is easy or difficult. These tasks and ranges are modified by such variables as cover, terrain, the weather, and the condition of the individual unit. In this way, players can use the battlefield strategically without getting bogged down in needlessly complicated tables. Indeed, the rules shy away from micromanaging the players, depending on them to fairly arbitrate among themselves and disclose when a unit is somehow different from the miniature representing it (for example, the miniature is holding a shotgun while the unit is armed with rifles). For those who find that they need assistance or further direction, a list of Accumulated Rulings is being assembled on the *Great Rail Wars* e-mail list and the list members have proven themselves willing to help and give advice.

The major weakness of the book comes in its proofreading. Several errors have slipped into the final product. Most of these are found in the spell lists, where the symbol for a particular class of spellcaster is missing. These minor errors, however, can be figured out with some diligent work on the part of a gamer. Less easy to work out is the mislabeling of the Nosferatu posse as a single figure, the absence of Bounty Point costs for fielding mounted units (10 or 5 for a single figure) and which groups may be mounted, the absence of rules for the hindrance Yeller ("The troop subtracts -2 from its Guts checks"), and a handful of others. Again, these are being compiled online and Pinnacle has a good record of posting errata promptly on their website. That being said, there are a surprising number of these lapses in the book.

The miniatures are good quality and come with little or occasional flashing (extra metal from the casting process) and are easy to paint. Experienced painters will also find much to interest them. The figures are roughly 30mm, making them similar in size to the Games Workshop and Wizards of the Coast lines, and stand roughly a head taller than the

Wargames Foundry line of Old West figures. Pictures of most of the miniatures are available both at the Pinnacle Web Site and at this reviewer's own site (<http://home.att.net/~mmdeforrest/deadlands/main.htm>). In addition to these figures, Pinnacle is introducing a line of vehicles from the game to accompany their vehicles supplement, *Derailed!* Players of games in similar genres (*GURPS Steampunk* and *Castle Falkenstein*, for example) may find some miniatures that they can use in these settings.

All in all, the *Great Rail Wars Miniatures Battle Game* is an enjoyable game and one I would highly recommend. The errors and absences in the text itself are disappointing but, if you are reading this, you should be able to access the errata online. Those uninterested in miniatures will not find much of interest in the rules but may find miniatures to their liking among the figures being produced to support the game.

-- *Matthew M. DeForrest*

Fiddly Bits: The Next Generation

Yes, it's the ratings bomb that is the Misc Fiddly Bits Column! Get your 2s ready, and enjoy! My only hope is Elizabeth McCoy, who promised me a 5 if I ran my "Generic *d20* Review" . . . I'm clearly a ratings slave.

* * *

It's been a busy two weeks around here, with happenings both good and bad. For those of you expecting some sort of comment last week, I apologize. We'd been planning a car-themed issue for a while, and it happened to fall on the same week as Big News around here.

Anyway, SJ Games restructured recently, as I'm sure many of you know. (I'd never *seen* so many people in the chat rooms as that Friday night . . .) And, in an ironic nutshell, the Bad News represented, in one fell swoop, everything I love and respect about SJ Games.

Bad Things happen to companies all the time. It is much less common for the president of the company to make the news available immediately, straight from his mouth. Even less common is it for a president to make himself available for two hours that evening, chatting with concerned friends, customers, and well-wishers. But this is a similar level of communication and honesty I respected ten years ago, when similar Bad Things happened, and the Secret Service showed a level of professionalism and intelligence normally reserved for people with names like Shemp.

I asked Steve one time if we were a big company with a small number of employees, or a small company with a lot of employees. He said the latter, and I tend to agree. And it's the family we all form -- employees, retailers, customers, and fans -- that I love. I'm deeply saddened that some good, hard-working people needed to leave the fold, but hopefully it will enable us to continue serving you all some of the best games in the biz.

And, more importantly, it'll enable us to stick around for another 10 years, when a giant government-controlled cybernetic tank is currently scheduled to plow through SJ Games' headquarters.

* * *

Pyramid's still here, and we're fine. We're breaking in a new webmaster on the mag (hi, Sage!), so things might be a bit different during the transition period. But we're not expecting any real changes.

However, for the next month or two I'm going to be busier than a bee. For longtime RTT readers (both of you), you'll remember that this time last year I was on my way to the [World Yo-Yo Contest](#) as part of my Day Job. Well, same story, different year. I'll be the scorer and general impartial lackey to those proceedings; on the off-hand chance you're a gamer and a yo-yo player in Orlando, you may want to stop by and say "Hi."

After that, two of the employees (including my boss) at the Day Job are going on two-week vacations. This wouldn't be problematic if we had more than three employees. We don't. As a result I'll be chained to a desk for those weeks, with a jar of Tang, a crate of Cocoa Puffs, and Freecell to keep me sane. Shortly after that, I'll be going to [Dragon*Con](#). (Again, if you're going to be there, keep an eye out for me!)

As a result, I'd please ask patience for those of you needing email correspondence, questions answered, and the like. If you need immediate feedback on anything, I should still be hanging out in the *Pyramid* [chat rooms](#), but it may not be until later in the evening (like. after 7 p.m. EST) for a month or two.

* * *

On the same evening as the Bad News two weeks ago, we received the bittersweet Good News . . . namely that *Pyramid* had won the [Origins Award](#) for Best Professional Magazine for 2000.

At the moment I read that, a steroid-laced peacock kicked down my door, plucked a piece of plumage, and literally knocked me over with selfsame feather. Clearly working for the Illuminati has some advantages.

I've said it before. There are more excellent products out there now in the gaming world than any time previously. And the diversity in those products is incredible.

In the Professional Magazine category this year we had two great comics, with [Dork Tower](#) and [Knights of the Dinner Table](#). *KotDT* won last year, and **everybody** loves *Dork Tower* (as witnessed by that comic's own well-deserved Best Gaming-Related Short Work for "Matt and Gilly's Big Date"). So losing to either Jolly Blackburn's or John Kovalic's wit and grace would not have been shocking or disappointing.

Then we have [Dragon Magazine](#), which is the oldest and still one of the best paper mags. Since *3rd Edition D&D* they've had (in my opinion) a renaissance, delivering great material every month. And the fact they supply another outlet for Ken Hite's and John Kovalic's geniuses is another plus. So if I were a betting man with an extra fifty to risk, Dave Gross' excellent magazine would have been my personal wager.

And then there's the dark horse (and, really, everyone loves a dark horse) of [Games Unplugged](#). Although the new kid on the block, they're still the only independent paper magazine I've seen at my local game shops for a *loooong* time, and for that I respect them and their crew.

And that's not even counting the folks who *weren't* nominated! *Dungeon Magazine*, in particular, has been (in my mind) brilliant of late . . . I subscribed for three years based on the strength of one issue! And the rules allowed other online publications to compete, too; [RPG.net](#) and [Gaming Outpost](#) both had excellent years in 2000.

So, in my opinion, it would've been really tough to have a *wrong* decision for this year . . . unless they did something silly like declare no one the winner or give the award to *Titanic* or something. But *Pyramid* won, and a peacock kicked my butt. And for that (*Pyramid* winning, not the peacock thing), I'm very grateful to all our fans that voted for us. As I've said before, we can't exist without you all.

I'm also thankful to everyone who works so dang hard making *Pyramid* as good as it is. There are the web programmers, like forerunners Jackie Hamilton and Keith Johnson, and current magi Mark Cogan and Sage Weber, that make sure we look great. Clearly any of these folks could have both made jillions of dollars working for MegaGloboInfoTeque, but instead they put their blood, sweat, and tears into the SJ Games' website in general and *Pyramid* specifically.

Then we have our regular contributors, Ken Hite and John Kovalic. As I said to them in a recent email, " My gratitude cannot be expressed in ASCII." Although these giants can (and do) make lots more money in other places, they stay with us . . . partly because we're all a family here, but mostly because I've offered to wash their cars if and when we meet. I currently owe each 16,917 car washes. Thank you.

We also have the contributors, both our other columnists we featured in 2000, and our irregular group of writers. The excellence of some of the material I get to cull from astounds me at times; it's always a delight to read through each batch of submissions . . . and a pain to choose the best ones.

Finally, we have the crew who've made *Pyramid* what it is up to this point. Scott Haring, in particular, launched the web version of this magazine, and helped define what our spirit would be; no one had done a weekly on-line subscription gaming magazine before, and the challenges (and opportunities) were considerable.

To paraphrase, if we appear great it's because we stand on the shoulders of giants. To those who've gone before us, thank you.

Oh, and I've thanked you all, the readers, right? (*rereads*) Yep. Thanks again. (And if I've forgotten anyone, it's because I'm still giggly as a schoolgirl . . . thank you, too.)

And keep that peacock away from me!

* * *

Finally, for those of you who don't hang around the chat rooms, here's something that happens when I eat too much Ben & Jerry's "From Russia With Buzz" coffee ice cream.

Pyramid Review

Generic d20 Adventure

Published by Generic Company

Written by Some Guy

32 pages; \$8.95

Generic Adventure is the latest offering from Generic Company. It is designed for characters levels 1 through 20, and requires the *Player's Handbook* to play. It features a dungeon crawl, and several new monsters. It has a couple of interesting twists, but is otherwise not dissimilar to other dungeon crawls. The art has nothing to speak for or against it, and the text is relatively well-written, with some mistakes. A full page is taken up by the OGL. The cover is moderately attractive, but doesn't have much to do with the inside contents. The price is a bit high, and the margins are a bit big, but online support from Generic Company makes it a good deal. If further offerings from this company are of the same quality, I will have a similar urge to buy it as I did this one.

Clearly I need help. (As an aside, if you're writing *d20* reviews, please try to keep them from sounding like this. It makes me cry. Focus on what sets the adventure apart from others. If the answer to that question is "nothing," maybe you should wait and review a couple adventures from the company at the same time . . .)

* * *

As an aside, Ken Hite and John Kovalic are still knee-deep in Con season, and are thus taking the week off. And with GenCon around the corner, they may well take some additional time off over the next month or so, too. And that's one to grow on.

--Steven Marsh

* * *

Last week's answer: GURPS Autoduel, 2nd Edition, p. 14. (It probably also appears in other editions or elsewhere, but that's where I found it.)

(Two stars) "SA: A to give one of your Lion Clan Disks +3A until the end of turn."

Designer's Notes: GURPS Spirits

by Stephen Kenson

GURPS Spirits started off on a pretty solid foundation. There was no need to create rules for spirits or spirit-based magic, they already existed in *GURPS Voodoo*, with the spirit rules expanded slightly in *GURPS Undead*. The trick was to take that foundation and build upon it, taking the systems originally designed for ghosts and Voodoo loa and applying them to spirits of all kinds throughout human myth and legend.

Right from the start, the book had something of a split personality. On the one hand, it was about spirits: how to model them using the *GURPS* rules, and how to use them as both player characters and NPCs. On the other hand, it was about how mortal player characters interacted with spirits, particularly having spirit servants and calling upon spiritual power, as defined by the ritual magic rules. It quickly became obvious that if *Spirits* was going to fulfill both these goals, some limits had to be imposed to keep the book from expanding far beyond its projected size.

One of those limits was dropping sample spirits from the spirit template chapter. With so many templates (a lucky 13, each with many variations), there wasn't room to provide a fully developed example of each type of spirit. *GURPS Cabal* helps address this, offering a number of different spirits created using the *Spirits* guidelines. Here are several other examples, based on the templates in *Spirits*.

Sample Angel: Aluriel (610 points)

Ageless. When materialized: 6', 160 lbs., a beautiful feminine figure with flowing golden hair and white feathered wings, dressed in a shimmering white robe.

ST: 14 [0] **IQ:** 15 [10] **Fatigue:** 24
DX: 15 [10] **HT:** 14 [0] **Senses:** 16
Speed: 7.25 **Move:** 7 **Will:** 17 **Dodge:** 7

Advantages: Angel [551]; Extra Fatigue +10 [30]

Disadvantages: Fanaticism [-15]; Intolerance (of Evil in all its forms) [-5]; Truthfulness [-5]; Unnatural Feature (glowing halo and wings) [-5].

Quirks: Considers herself "a healer, not a fighter", but fights better than most mortals; Understands that suffering is a part of God's plan; Attributes her healing to a higher power ("it is not done by me, but through me"); Is always amazed by humanity's capacity for both goodness and evil; Innocent and unconcerned about worldly matters.

Skills: Bard-14 [1]; Brawling-16 [2]; Broadsword-15 [2]; Exorcism-15 [4]; Flight-15 [2]; Intimidation-15 [2]; Occultism-14 [1]; Theology-17 [2]*.

*Includes racial bonus.

Languages: Latin (native)-15 [0]; English-15 [2] (or other standard campaign language).

Spells (1 point each, except where noted. Includes +3 for Power Investiture): Awaken-15; Beast Soother-15; Cook-15; Counterspell-15; Create Fire-15; Create Food-15; Cure Disease-15; Dispel Magic-15; Flaming Weapon-15; Heat-15; Ignite Fire-15; Lend Health-15; Lend Strength-15; Major Healing-15; Minor Healing-15; Regeneration-14; Restoration-14; Seek Food-15; Sense Emotion-15; Sense Foes-15; Shape Fire-15; Sense Life-15; Sterilize-15; Test Food-15; Truthsayer-15, Ward-15.

Equipment: holy broadsword (cut 2d+3, imp 1d+4)

Description: Aluriel is an angel in service to Raphael, the archangel of healing. Her duties are generally those of an angel of mercy: sent to aid the injured and the sick, and also to shepherd the dying to their rightful place in Heaven. But there are times when her duties require her to protect the innocent and the pious from the forces of Hell, which is when she calls upon her holy sword and her power to shroud it in purifying flame. Aluriel feels deeply for the plight of mortals, although she doesn't quite understand their capacity for cruelty and evil. She exists to ease suffering and offer succor, but she acknowledges that suffering is sometimes part of God's plan. Her desire to heal and end suffering does not extend to the forces of Hell, and Aluriel fiercely protects her charges against them when necessary. She hates and pities the undead and considers ending their unnatural existence a mercy.

Aluriel is suitable as a patron or an occasional ally in a *GURPS Fantasy* campaign where angels intervene to aid the pious. She can be used as a player character in a campaign involving powerful spirits like angels and demons; with a few adjustments she can be a player character in a *GURPS In Nomine* campaign.

Sample Animal Spirit: Old-Tooth (575 points)

Ageless. In material form: 20 feet long and 2,000 lbs, a large bull crocodile.

ST: 28 [165] **IQ:** 10 [0] **Fatigue:** 28

DX: 12 [0] **HT:** 14/22 [45] **Senses:** 16 (hearing 18, taste and smell 19)

Speed: 6.5 **Move:** 4 (land)/7 (water) **Will:** 14 **Dodge:** 6

Advantages: Acute Hearing +2 [4]; Acute Taste and Smell +3 [6]; Alertness +6 [30]; Amphibious [10]; Damage Resistance 2 [6]; Damage Resistance +2 (Limitation: except on stomach -15%) [5]; Enhanced Move (Swimming, Move 7) +20% [2]; Extra Fatigue +14 [42]; Extra Hit Points +8 [40]; Four Legs [5]; Nictating Membrane x 1 [10]; Night Vision [10]; Passive Defense 2 [50]; Passive Defense +1 (Limitation: except on stomach -15%) [22]; Peripheral Vision [15]; Sharp Teeth [5]; Spirit Form [100]; Striker (Reach 1) [10]; Strong Will +4 [12]; Subsonic Speech [20].

Disadvantages: Attentive [-1]; Cold-Blooded [-5]; Color Blindness [-10]; Gluttony [-5]; Hidebound [-5]; Hideous [-20]; Horizontal [-10]; Inconvenient Size [-10]; Innumerate [-5]; No Fine Manipulators [-30]; Obdurate [-10]; Poverty (Dead Broke) [-25]; Reduced Move (Land; Move 4) -2 [-10]; Short Arms [-10]; Sleepy (50%) [-10].

Quirks: Likes to be told he's handsome, angered when people say he's ugly; Dislikes being awakened without a *very* good reason; Picky eater, likes eating chicken and duck best of all; Insists on knowing a person's name and where they're from before eating them; Proud [-5].

Skills: Animal Handling (Crocodiles)- 11/16 [6]; Area Knowledge (the Swamp)-14 [8]; Brawling-15 [8]; Naturalist-11 [6]; Stealth-13 [4]; Survival (Swamp)-13 [8].

Description: Old-Tooth is a crocodile spirit that lives in an expansive swamp he calls home. He spends most of his time in the spirit world, sleeping, occasionally rousing himself to wander around looking for something to eat. He usually eats only spirit prey but he's been known to materialize to devour a particularly succulent water fowl he comes across, or an intruder in his domain. He always appears and talks with intruders first before eating them, since he likes to know where his meal is coming from. He's intelligent, but not overly interested in anything other than food and a long nap.

Old-Tooth receives worship and sacrifices from a local tribe, but he's otherwise relatively indifferent to them. Their shaman has to promise him a great feast to get the old spirit to do much of anything, but he can be persuaded through sacrifices and flattery to use his powers on others' behalf. The regular attention also helps sustain Old-Tooth so he has no worries about fading away, unless something happens to his tribe.

Old-Tooth is suitable for use in any fantasy campaign with a suitable environment. He could also easily show up in a *GURPS Egypt* setting as a Nile crocodile spirit (perhaps cared for by priests) or in a modern-day *GURPS Voodoo* campaign as an alligator spirit living in a Louisiana swamp with a Cajun community as his "tribe".

Sample Ascended Spirit: Sir Tam Ekul (337 points)

Apparent age 58. 5'9", apparent weight 150 lbs. A distinguished older man with salt-and-pepper hair and a neatly trimmed beard, wearing a military-style uniform with a cloak and a serene expression on his face.

ST: 11 [10] **IQ:** 14 [45] **Fatigue:** 20
DX: 14 [45] **HT:** 12 [20] **Senses:** 14
Speed: 6.5 **Move:** 6 **Will:** 16 **Dodge:** 6

Advantages: Ascended Spirit [115]; Charisma +1 [5]; Extra Fatigue +8 [24]; Reputation +2 (among Star-Knights) [5]; Strong Will +2 [8]; Trained by a Master [40].

Disadvantages: Code of Honor (Imperial: attack only in self defense; never use your powers to cause harm; uphold the law; protect the weak) [-15]; Enemy (the Dark Knights; 6 or less) [-20]; Sense of Duty (to the Knights of the Empire) [0, included in Ascended Spirit template].

Quirks: Talks in riddles to get pupils to think; Appears at inopportune times and places; Wistful about his time as a physical being; Insists that "some things never change" [-4].

Skills: Acrobatics-14 [4]; Armory (Force Sword)-14 [2]; Blind Fighting 14 [8]; Fast-Draw (Force Sword)-16 [4]; Jumping-14 [1]; Katana (Force Sword)-18 [24]; Meditation-14 [8]; Teaching-15 [4]; Theology (Star-Knight)-14 [4].

Description: Tam Ekul was an honored member of the Star-Knights, the mystical champions of peace and justice throughout the Galactic Empire. He was known as one of the Knights' great masters. When he was struck down through treachery by one of his own students, Sir Ekul's enlightenment was great enough for him to transcend the material plane altogether, becoming a being of pure spirit. He has taken his place among the ascended masters of the Knights, and continues his role of teaching new generations of apprentices the psychic arts they will need to overcome the forces of evil in the galaxy.

Tam Ekul is designed as a mentor for a character (or group of characters) in a cinematic *GURPS Space* campaign featuring psionic powers and martial arts. With a little adjustment (mostly involving his choice of weapon skills) he'd make a suitable spirit mentor for warrior or martial artist characters from nearly any campaign setting.

Sample Demon: Sinthia (566 points)

Ageless. 5'8" 120 lbs, a beautiful woman with long, dark hair and tiny horns on her forehead, dressed provocatively.

ST: 12 [0] **IQ:** 13 [30] **Fatigue:** 12
DX: 13 [20] **HT:** 13 [0] **Senses:** 13
Speed: 6.5 **Move:** 6 **Will:** 14 **Dodge:** 6

Advantages: Succubus [516]; Strong Will +1 [4]

Disadvantages: Dread (religious symbols) [-10]; Sadism [-15]

Quirks: Likes her lovers strong and forceful, at first; Likes corrupting religious people most of all; Lets people buy her drinks, then nurses them; Drinks often but never eats [-4].

Skills: Acting-13 [2]; Brawling-13 [1]; Carousing-13 [2]; Courtesan-14 [4]; Erotic Art-17 [4]*; Interrogation-13 [2]; Sex Appeal-16 [4]**; Shapeshift-17 [0]***; Slight of Hand-12 [2]; Snake Charming-14 [4].

* Includes racial bonus

** Includes Voice.

*** Free from racial package

Languages: English-13 [0]

Innate Spells: Stealth Strength-22 [0, from racial package]

Description: Sinthia is a succubus originally summoned to serve a mortal master. He got careless one day and Sinthia is now on her own, free to do as she pleases, and she enjoys being in the physical world too much to want to leave, especially when there are *so* many people that want her special attention. She's taken a job working as a stripper in an expensive nightclub and she's known for wearing live snakes in her act (and little or nothing else). She chooses her "boyfriends" carefully to avoid arousing too much suspicion, although occasionally an unattached man from out of town will disappear and his body will turn up in an alley somewhere.

Sinthia is suitable for a modern occult or horror campaign like *GURPS Voodoo*. To use her in the *Technomancer* setting, simply substitute the Technomancer succubus package (p. TM64) for the one given in *Spirits*. She can easily fit into most any other setting, from the Old West to medieval fantasy to cyberpunk with a slight adjustment to her background.

Sample Djinn: Khanjar the Mighty (650 points)

Ageless. 10' tall, 2,000 lbs., an ugly humanoid figure wearing iron armbands, with a bald head and eyes like fire.

ST: 20 [0] **IQ:** 12 [10] **Fatigue:** 25
DX: 14 [0] **HT:** 16 [20] **Senses:** 15
Speed: 7.5 **Move:** 7 (14 in air form) **Will:** 14 **Dodge:** 10

Advantages: Djinn [600]; Extra Fatigue +5 [15]; Strong Will +2 [8]

Disadvantages: Involuntary Duty (to the holder of the lamp, all the time) [-20]

Quirks: Long-winded, especially about his own powers; Unfailingly polite, even when he threatens; Likes to wrestle to demonstrate his great strength; Dislikes servitude but appreciates praise and recognition for his work; Tends to forget about mortal limitations like breathing and sleeping.

Skills: Brawling-14 [1]; Broadsword-14 [2]; Carousing-16 [2]; Flight-14 [2]; Interrogation-12 [2]; Intimidation-13 [4]; Occultism-12 [2]; Wrestling-15 [4].

Languages: Arabic-12 [0]

Spells: (one point each for skill 12 unless specified otherwise, includes Magery bonus) Clean, Create Air, Destroy Air, Fear, Find Weakness, Illusion Disguise, Illusion Shell, Purify Air, Rejoin, Repair, Restore, Sense Emotion, Sense Foes, Shape Air, Simple Illusion, Weaken, Windstorm, Whirlwind.

Description: Despite his impressive title, Khanjar the Mighty is actually a lesser djinn, bound centuries ago to a brass lamp he inhabits. He is forced to obey the holder of the lamp, a situation that does not meet with his approval, although he carries out his duties to the best of his ability, as a matter of pride. Khanjar does not hesitate to boast about his powers or his greatness, and he always makes it clear to his master that he will wreck vengeance upon him if he ever escapes servitude.

Khanjar is suitable as an NPC for a *GURPS Arabian Nights* campaign or fantasy campaign with an Arabian flavor (like the Islamic nations of Yrth). He could also show up in a *Supers* game if his lamp falls into the possession of a world-be hero or villain.

Sample Elemental: Ember (304 points)

Ageless. 5' tall, 80 lbs., a vaguely female humanoid shape made up of fire.

ST: 9 [-10] **IQ:** 12 [20] **Fatigue:** 13
DX: 14 [45] **HT:** 12 [20] **Senses:** 12
Speed: 6.5 **Move:** 6 **Will:** 13 **Dodge:** 6

Advantages: Extra Fatigue +4 [12]; Fire Elemental [235]; Strong Will +1 [4]

Disadvantages: Involuntary Duty (to her master, all the time) [-20]

Quirks: Enjoys burning certain woods like humans enjoy smoking (particularly apple and hickory); Thinks humans regard fire too much as a tool; Tends toward excessive force to get the job done [-3].

Skills: Brawling-13 [1]; Breathe Fire-14 [0]

Languages: English-12 [0]

Description: Ember is a fire elemental in service to a wizard, who conjured her with a female form that pleased him and named her. Ember doesn't really think of herself as female, but has gotten used to the idea over time. Her master has treated her well for the most part and allows her to burn things from time to time, although not quite as often as Ember would like. She's intrigued by the physical world with an almost childlike curiosity, but has begun to understand that physical creatures don't share her resistance to or love for fire. Ember is a suitable NPC for any sort of fantasy campaign. For campaigns using *GURPS Magic*, make her a magical elemental according to the guidelines in *Spirits*.

The Ritual Magic Switcheroo

Announcer [whispers]: We're here at the Ministry of Serendipity, where we've switched their regular mana-based magic for ritual magic. Let's see if anyone notices . . .

The other major component of *Spirits*, apart from the spirits themselves, is an expansion of the ritual magic rules first published in *GURPS Voodoo*. *Spirits* focuses solely on ritual magic that involves contacting spiritual beings (other sorts of ritual magic await treatment in *GURPS Ritual Magic*), but it still provides a complete alternate system of magic for *GURPS*.

Ritual magic makes an interesting substitution for mana-based magic in a number of settings, since it's generally more subtle, mysterious, and closer to various cultures' historical beliefs about magic. Consider the possibilities of substituting or adding ritual magic to some existing *GURPS* settings:

Alternate Earths

Several of the worlds described in *Alternate Earths 1 & 2* could easily become fantasy worlds with the addition of ritual magic and spirits. Roma Aeterna from *Alternate Earths 1* could become an interesting steampunk & sorcery combo with Roman magicians as well as Chinese sorcerers and Incan shamans. Likewise, Ezcalli could feature Aztec priests with magical powers (and bloodthirsty patron spirits) along with Native American and Mongol shamans. Imagine cross-time travelers visiting Reich-5 and discovering that the Nazis' legendary mystical experiments have borne terrible fruit. Perhaps a cross-time alliance with Yrth or Merlin is called for to combat the menace?

Alternate Earths 2 offers Ming-3, the perfect setting for Chinese alchemists and sorcerers to work their magic behind the scenes, dealing with the denizens of the August Spirits Courts. There's also Midgard, where Viking *vitki* and *sidhr* can use shamanic techniques and runes to perform feats of magic. Of course, adding ritual magic to either Cornwallis or Aeolus could provide an interesting Illuminated conspiracy behind the political troubles on either of those worlds (particularly if one borrows ideas from *Voodoo* or *Cabal* for the world's mystical history).

Historical Settings

Virtually any historical worldbook for *GURPS* can be turned into a historical fantasy with the addition of ritual magic. The ritual magic system resembles historical beliefs about magic more than the "fireballs and lightning bolts" style of the mana magic system, so it fits easily into almost any setting. *Arabian Nights*, *Aztecs*, *China*, *Egypt* and *Imperial Rome* are a few examples of worldbooks where ritual magic creates a historical fantasy setting. Just change the names of the various paths and rituals to something suitably atmospheric for the setting, and off you go.

GURPS Old West, features a scaled-down version of the ritual magic rules for Indian shamanism, making *Spirits* a great resource for expanding the powers of Indian shamans (and maybe adding in some European magicians and Chinese sorcerers to rub-elbows with them in your own version of the Weird West). A historical campaign based on the setting from *Voodoo* could take place in the Old West, with Lodge magicians backing the expansionist American government, working against Indian shamans and Chinese sorcerers (as well as their spirit allies).

Ritual magic also fits in well with the Victorian era of *Steampunk* since the Victorian Age saw a renaissance of ritual magic and occultism with groups like the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. *GURPS Castle Falkenstein* uses a version of the ritual magic rules, adapted for that world's unique form of magic. GMs could easily substitute the ritual magic rules (as well as the faerie and spirits) from *Spirits*, if desired.

Cyberworld and Cthulhupunk

Fantasy/cyberpunk fusions tend toward the spectacular, with fireball-throwing mages and rampant monsters, but ritual magic can work just as well in a cyberpunk setting, either for a "secret" magical campaign or a balance between tech and magic. The *Cyberworld* setting is practically tailor-made for adding in some secret occult elements: the NERCC's ban on occult organizations and certain religions in the U.S. may be because there really *is* a "Satanic conspiracy," or at least the ProGov wants to limit the ability of magicians to operate openly. *Spirits* also talks about the possibilities of "net shamans," who might appear at the cutting-edge of *Cyberworld* technology.

The match is even more natural (or *unnatural* . . .) when you add *GURPS Cthulhupunk* to the mix. Ritual magic works well with the feel and style of the Mythos stories. The Mythos spells and rituals from *Cthulhupunk* can simply be extensions of the ritual magic system, perhaps even part of a specialized and secretive path of their own.

Fantasy (Yrth)

The world of Yrth is aimed at classical swords and sorcery fantasy, but substituting ritual magic for mana-based magic creates a world more akin to Katherine Kurtz's *Deryni* novels or Judith Tarr's *The Hound and the Falcon* books. Magic is a subtle, yet still pervasive, force. Priests in both Christian and Islamic lands offer blessings to the faithful and protect them against the forces of evil. Hermetic wizards descended from Middle Age occultists vie for power and knowledge in Meglos and elsewhere, while the Northern Barbarians (and perhaps even the orcs) have their shamans, and who knows what spirits (or magic) can be found in Sahud or beyond the Fence of God, in the land of the Djinn?

Of course, ritual magic can be pretty spectacular at times, too. With three levels of Ritual Adept and five of Ritual Aptitude (which conveniently cost the same as three levels of Magery), a ritual magician can almost rival a mage in terms of speed (casting rituals in 1d seconds), plus a magician isn't dependent on mana and ritual magic has no fatigue cost! This means ritual magic can also be an effective *rival* of mana-based magic as well as a substitute. Perhaps the religious mystics of Yrth tap into spiritual power while wizards wield magic based on mana, creating a distinction between clerical and arcane magic.

Technomancer

Ritual magic significantly changes the feel of the *Technomancer* setting, since ritual magic is less given to mass production (unless the GM wants to develop a ritual parallel to the industrial enchantment system in *Technomancer*). Still, imagine the potential of a modern world much like our own where effectively ritual magic was widely known, and you can create urban fantasies more like Sean Stewart's *Night Watch* or Emma Bull's *War for the Oaks* than Poul Anderson's *Operation Chaos* or Harry Turtledove's *Case of the Toxic Spell Dump* (which *Technomancer* more closely

resembles). Imagine taking the "secret history" of *Voodoo* or *Cabal* and making it (or at least *some* of it) public knowledge.

How will the world change to deal with the existence of spirits and their powers? Only you can say for sure. Have fun with it!

Summer Conventions At The Crossroads

by Scott D. Haring

It's that time of year again. We wait 11 months for a big, national blowout of a game convention, and then we get two -- four weeks apart.

Who planned *that*?

For the first time in quite a while, I'm missing both Origins and GenCon. Which is too bad -- I always have a good time, even as I return both footsore and sleep-deprived. I figure that's a good thing, especially if the time can be spent hanging around with gamers, seeing old friends, and playing lots of great games.

I don't want to spend too much of the column waxing nostalgic, but it might be appropriate in this case. Both of these conventions are going to see major changes in the next couple of years.

This is going to be the last Origins run by the current Wizards of the Coast events staff. The Game Manufacturers Association (GAMA) has owned the show for years, but has always contracted out actual event management, first to a series of fan groups (back in the different-city-every-year days), and then to a professional company called Andon that had established itself by running a series of successful game conventions in the Midwest. Later, WotC bought Andon and absorbed them into their events division, and with it, the contract to run Origins.

But no more. Wizards of the Coast has pulled out of the deal, and this will be their last Origins. Several of the top hands that helped run previous shows have already left the company. That, coupled with what could easily be perceived as a "what the heck -- we're outta here, anyway" attitude by WotC, could mean that this year's Origins might be a little, uh, disorganized. I mean, moreso than usual.

(It suddenly occurred to me that writing this on the first day of the show, with no word from Columbus as to how things are going, might not be the brightest thing to do. Especially since none of you are going to read this until well after the show is over, and the word will already be out as to whether the con was successful or not. Oh, well. I live for danger . . .)

Next year, GAMA runs Origins itself. Mark Simmons, who has cut his teeth on the GAMA Trade Show and made quite a success of it, becomes the man with the plan. He's added staff -- including one of those ex-WotC events guys -- and the GAMA budget has exploded. Simmons and his people are good, but running Origins is going to be a big, big step up from what they've been doing up to now. I have a lot of confidence in their abilities, and I have no doubt that down the road, Origins is going to continue to grow and become an even greater show -- I just hope things go OK in 2002, that crucial first year when the new team finds out all the things that can go wrong that they hadn't thought about.

But I'm excited about their plans. The new Origins management has made a real commitment to a year-round online presence, and their plans include online convention and event registration, online event proposals, downloadable pre-reg and program books -- the whole nine yards. If it all works, it's going to be very sweet.

And at the rate things are going, Origins has a chance -- a very good chance -- of eclipsing GenCon as the premiere, must-go-to convention of the summer. Because while Origins is showing all the signs of busting out and getting huge, some disturbing snippets of news show me that GenCon is fraying a bit at the edges.

For example, the extremely popular GenCon day care facility has been canceled this year. Liability issues, I hear. Even with all the waivers, disclaimers, and licenses in the world, Hasbro decided that they would be too tempting a target for lawsuits in case the slightest thing went wrong. And you know, they could very well be right. But it still doesn't bode well.

The game auctions at both GenCon and Origins were nearly canceled this year. Actually, they *were* canceled -- very

quietly. Nobody made an announcement or anything, they just didn't appear in the pre-reg books or on the website or anything. Some auction fans noticed and raised a stink, though, and enough of them volunteered to help run them that they got added back to the schedule.

And it's important to note that Wizards of the Coast has a number of years left on their contract to run Origins -- they just decided to pull out, and pretty much dared GAMA to do something about it. (Negotiations toward a settlement, I hear, are ongoing.) Add it all together, and it sounds an awful lot like Hasbro isn't all that interested in being in the convention business.

There's no need to panic just yet. This year's GenCon should be a blast, as usual. You should definitely go, if you can swing it. And institutional inertia being what it is, next year's show should be more of the same. But GenCon 2002 is the last one scheduled for Milwaukee, and that's a very interesting fact.

Milwaukee has been too small for GenCon for years. The new, improved Midwest Express Center was built primarily because of GenCon -- or so the folks at TSR bragged. But the convention center was only the half of it. Hotel rooms within walking distance of the convention center are near-impossible to come by, not because there aren't any good hotels -- there are plenty -- but because the GenCon demand is so high. Faced with this fact, and confident at the time that GenCon would continue to get bigger and bigger, Wizards of the Coast allowed their deal with Milwaukee to expire several years ago, and signed a contract to move GenCon to Indianapolis starting in 2003.

By all accounts, Indianapolis is a great site for a show like GenCon. Great facility, great amenities, plenty of hotel rooms. But if -- I'm saying "if," mind you, because it's purest speculation -- if Hasbro continues to work toward disentangling itself from the convention business, wouldn't the break between Milwaukee and Indianapolis be the perfect time to just pull the plug? Indianapolis wouldn't be happy, but it's easier to pull out of a deal that hasn't started up yet than one that is ongoing. And as their dealings with Origins shows, a big corporation like Hasbro is going to do what it wants to do, and problems with contracts and such are just another cost of doing business.

And that would be that. Because aside from Wizards of the Coast, nobody has the size, the staff, or the budget to take on a 20,000-plus attendance game convention. Only a trade organization -- like GAMA -- could possibly take over, and they've made it clear that their priority lies with growing Origins.

And let's face it -- GenCon is a bit of a dinosaur. It's fun, sure, and it's a great point of pride for Wizards of the Coast, but do they really *need* it? I doubt they're losing money on the deal (Hasbro might have shut them down already if they were), but is it enough of a cash cow to justify the costs? Not to mention the two-week disruption back at the home office, as no work gets done by anybody because they're either getting ready for GenCon, *at* GenCon, or recovering from GenCon.

I hope I'm wrong. I hope this is just idle speculation. I hope to have a great time in Milwaukee next year and Indianapolis in 2003. But I won't be surprised if I don't. Meanwhile, look for me next year for sure in Columbus . . .

I, Virus

A Non-Mythos Creature for Modern-Day *Call of Cthulhu*

by J. Edward Tremlett

This article presents a modern-day, non-Mythos threat for Investigators to deal with. It is a manmade, mind-stealing virus that leaps from victim to victim seeking a better way to reproduce itself. Such a threat could be suitable for any modern-day *Call of Cthulhu* campaign, and would work very well in campaigns set in Pagan Publishing's *Delta Green* setting.

As written, the threat presented in this article has no direct basis in the Mythos. However, at least one possibility for Mythos content is given under "Story Ideas," at the end of the article. Keepers should feel free to use or discard the possibility as best suits their own needs.

The Gaumont Virus

Developed by mistake in early 2000, the Gaumont Virus (gaw-MON) was unleashed on an unsuspecting world when its creator, for whom it was posthumously named, was infected by his own creation. Since then it has popped up from time to time -- running its course for a short season, being contained or destroyed, and then reappearing somewhere else at a later date.

The virus has the amazing and horrifying potential to gain sentience from its very first infection. When it attacks the neural tissue of an organism and rewrites the DNA of those cells, it impresses its own viral instincts upon the mind of the host-body. This creates an amalgamation of a human's memories and skills, and a virus' basic instincts and desire for survival and propagation. It also gives the body greater strength and stamina in order to protect its cargo.

When the virus leaves one host-body for another -- entailing the death of the previous host -- it retains the memories and skills that it stole before, and adds them to what it learns from the new host. In this way it grows in stolen experience, knowledge and skill, creating a very dangerous, intelligent adversary.

The virus' collective intelligence has the potential for immortality, but its hosts have a limited lifespan once infected. The host can last for three days in many cases, and five or six at most. All that's left behind upon the egress of the virus is a gruesome corpse with brains the consistency of oatmeal.

History of the Gaumont Virus

The Virus was created in late 1999 by Dr. Humbert Gaumont, a French scientist working at Pandor Biochemical in Dubuque, Iowa.

Dr. Gaumont was brought from Blanchemical, a small, French biochemical outfit, to Pandor in early 1999 to help them with Project Panacea. What Gaumont was doing for Blanchemical is still largely unknown. However, given the scandal that erupted when the French firm was caught selling biotoxins to Iraq in June of 2000, one can make some educated guesses.

Project Panacea was a health worker's dream come true. The outline promised a cure-all for viral infections by creating the base for a universal countervirus. As envisioned, the countervirus could be programmed with a victim's original DNA, and then introduced to the victim's body to reprogram infected cells with their normal, pre-infection DNA sequences. In theory this would both cure the patient and flush out hostile virii.

The practical application of such a far-reaching thing was still rather far off, of course, and all of Pandor's attempts to engineer their universal countervirus had failed. But such a concept had more than enough merit behind it, a great deal of practical need in the here and now and the distinct possibility of making Pandor very rich. So research on the countervirus continued.

Unfortunately for Pandor, Dr. Gaumont was more interested in his own perverse amusement than any scientific progress or humanitarian concern. He had gone into the medical profession to act out his deranged fantasies on living, helpless victims, and his brilliance in biochemical engineering was sadly misused to these ends. His former employers at Blanchemical -- who'd enjoyed his services since 1996 -- either didn't care about this problem, or encouraged it.

Shortly after Gaumont's arrival at Pandor, and installment into Project Panacea, he discovered that he'd created a retrovirus that could turn neural matter into inert, semi-liquid glop in minutes. This had the effect of creating a rather gruesome mess, as the brains tended to spill out of the test animals' heads. Such a sight excited Gaumont to no end, and he spent many months in late 1999 and early 2000 "experimenting" with this new toy.

His mania for the visible aftermath of his virus took its toll. He was constantly and recklessly tinkering with the recipe to produce faster and more gruesome effects, and he eventually lost track of the exact biochemical effects his toy was creating. He also lost any real sight of what kind of thing he was developing in the process of "continuing research."

On March 24th, 2000, around 10 a.m., Dr. Gaumont accidentally infected himself. He was in the containment room, pulling a sample of the virus from its sample container using a syringe, but was not wearing his protective clothing. As far as the security cameras could tell, he lost his balance and squirted himself in the face with a syringe of his latest, improved batch.

A twelve-day manhunt ensued, involving not only the Dubuque Police Department but also the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the US Army Medical Research Institute of Infectious Disease (USAMRIID). By the time it was over, Dr. Gaumont was dead, and one of his superiors at Pandor -- Dr. Meredith Baxter -- had been infected just before he collapsed.

USAMRIID placed Baxter in "The Slammer" back at their HQ in Ft. Detrick, Maryland, and observed her closely for the four days leading up to her gruesome death. All scientific information that they, the CDC, and the National Security Agency (NSA) have on the Gaumont Virus come from both this period of observation, and the experimentation with her remains.

The world at large has no idea that the Gaumont Virus exists. The CDC quarantined Pandor, and imposed a news blackout to "avoid panic." A few conspiracy researchers have made a great deal of noise about what they might have been hiding, but so far no one's come close to the truth. Pandor has since been investigated into Chapter Eleven bankruptcy, and all its questionable files are in "administrative limbo."

Of the various alphabet soup agencies, only the NSA know of the Gaumont Virus. The CDC operates with the tacit understanding that should they come across a Strain, they should impose a quarantine, let USAMRIID come in to handle it and collect samples, and then inform the NSA. Meanwhile, the NSA is on the lookout for any hostile powers' attempts to engineer such a virus, and is presumably informing USAMRIID of what they have discovered -- which either hasn't been much, or has been on too high of a need-to-know basis for them to know.

USAMRIID's Scientific Notes on the Gaumont Virus

The Gaumont Virus is a genetically-engineered retrovirus: a microscopic, manmade organism containing genetic material designed to rewrite the DNA of the cells it targets, with the eventual end of reproducing itself in those cells.

It is transmitted through the skin, burrowing down into the bloodstream and cycling to the brain. It affects the neural matter of warm-blooded creatures, and its incubation rate is almost instantaneous, with humans showing the full range of symptoms within minutes of being exposed. In small animals the symptomology is pronounced even faster.

A single Gaumont Virus is 0.3 microns in length, and shaped like a short arrow, with legs instead of feathers at the blunt end. The "legs" are its receptors, by which it bonds to the neural cells. The genetic material is kept in the "arrowhead," and travels down the length of the "shaft" to the cell once its receptors have bonded with the membrane.

Once inside the neural cell, the genetic material enters its nucleus and overrides its normal functions. The most obvious change is in the chemicals it secretes to carry electrical impulses along, known as neurotransmitters. It also stimulates the neural cells -- which normally do not replicate themselves at all -- to turn on their more complex generative processes and begin manufacturing virii.

The infected cells are programmed to create two new kinds of neurotransmitters. The first impresses the virus' instincts upon the host-body's thought processes and biology, causing the body's voluntary muscles to bulk up at an abnormal rate and raising the body's temperature above normal. It also hyper-stimulates all natural defenses and healing processes, after "convincing" them that the virus is no threat, of course. The second new neurotransmitter encourages the neural cells to start secreting both of these abnormal neurotransmitters, whether they've been infected by individual virii or not. This creates a cascade reaction that soon has the entire brain acting in accordance with the virus' desires.

Most virii follow a preprogrammed biological cycle that they cannot deviate from -- one that has infected cells churn out new copies of the virus like a rapid photocopy machine, until they burst open and release their poison seeds to infect other cells. The Gaumont Virus, on the other hand, is able to slow down the rate of viral reproduction in the infected cells. There is a limit to the virus' ability to deny its biological destiny, and there will come a time when it can no longer keep from replicating itself to the degree that it should. The death of the host-body will follow soon after this occurs.

The virus can cause the increased production of itself at any time before it absolutely has to, which is usually how it spreads itself from host to host. When it makes the decision to do so, it will send the signal to produce as many copies of itself as is possible. Somehow, the information that it has learned from this host-body is stored in these new copies of the virus via electrochemical means, and will be passed onto the new host-body along with the genetic material.

In the process of making itself en masse, the virus causes the cell walls of the neural material to dissolve. This turns a significant amount of the host-body's brain matter to very runny, slightly acidic goo. The caustic, coral slop eats through the membranes by the nasal cavity, and drips out into the throat.

All the virus has to do then is expectorate a gout of those virus-saturated, liquid brains onto any animal or human nearby. It can do this until the host-body's ability to control its voluntary muscles dissolves. The destruction of the brain's autonomic centers follows soon after, and then it's all over for the previous host.

In its current state, the virus is strictly anaerobic. Even if secured in liquid or solid brain matter it will survive in the harsh environment outside of a warm, stable body for no more than 24 hours. If contained in an anaerobic environment -- such as a vacuum-packed vial -- it can go into an eternal state of dormancy.

All strains that USAMARIID know of come from the samples they took from Ms. Baxter's corpse, and have been appropriately labeled as the Baxter Strain -- a Level 4 biohazard.

Game Mechanics

For the purposes of this article, the term "Strain" is used to refer to a single, linear vector: the current host, and the sum of who it's absorbed so far. Every time the Strain infects a new victim, it undergoes an Iteration, and may go through several Iterations before anyone can deal with it. Worse, if the virus manages to infect more than one person, there will be other Strains running about, increasing the threat: such Strains are referred to as Parallel Strains.

The Gaumont Virus can only be transmitted through the blood or skin. It cannot be inhaled. Anyone ingesting it can make a CONx3 roll to have the stuff be engulfed and dissolved by digestive fluids.

An Investigator who gets it on her skin or in her bloodstream will suffer a POT 20 infection. If the Investigator resists

it on the resistance table, she's fine, but she will have to roll every round that she has the slop on or in her. One failing roll means she's infected.

Seen in that light, injection into the bloodstream is the most sure-fire way of infection. Keepers who want to give a stricken Investigator a chance could say that it's out of their system in 24 minus CON hours, with a resistance roll made every five minutes. However, it might be more honest to just say the Investigator's a goner the moment it hits the brain.

Once successfully infected, a victim has her memories subsumed into the virus' collective intelligence. The virus gains the host's Skills, INT and EDU, raising them up to the current host's level if her levels were higher than its previous levels, or retaining the Strain's previous, stolen levels if they were less. The host-body takes on the POW of the virus, no matter how high or low her own was; the virus' POW is equal to the first victim it took, plus 1.

For example: the first host seized by a sample of the virus has a Dodge of 40%, a Chemistry of 01%, an INT of 14, POW of 14 and an EDU of 10. The virus absorbs these memories and skills, gains of POW of 15, and continues on its merry way. The next host that Strain seizes has a Dodge of 10%, a Chemistry of 50%, an INT of 13, POW of 18 and an EDU of 18. When the virus takes control, it will now have a Dodge of 40%, a Chemistry of 50%, an INT of 14 and an EDU of 18. However, its POW remains at 15, and will always remain at 15.

The absorption of the host-body's mental properties also gives the virus some sense of its emotional sensibilities, which it is usually free to ignore or use as it deems fit. However, there is a chance that the strongest feelings of the host-body might survive the infection and color the virus' actions -- making it refrain from harming loved ones, or wanting to do certain, needless things as it goes along.

In order to see if this happens, roll the host-body's POW against the POW of the virus upon infection. If the virus succeeds, it has no compunction to follow any of the body's emotional dictates. If the host-body triumphs, the Keeper should pick a few nuances and desires for the virus to manifest at inopportune moments.

Less than an hour after initial infection, the body's voluntary muscles start to swell up like balloons, and the host body's natural defenses and healing processes go into hyperdrive to maintain a stable environment for the virus. Increase the host-body's STR and CON by 1 for each hour that goes by past the first, up to a maximum gain of 8. Increase the host-body's SIZ by 1 after four hours have gone by, and then 1 more after the body's maximum acceleration is reached at the eighth hour. APP goes down by 1 every time SIZ increases in this fashion, as the skin reddens and stretches, creating a puffy, grotesque look.

At any time, the Virus can send the signal to increase the infected cells' production of itself. In five rounds' time it will be ready to make an Expectorant Attack, which it makes at 80%, once per round. It will spit, cough and hack up liquefied lumps of infected brain on anything within hand to hand combat range, and anything which has the mess get onto their bare skin must make a resistance roll as outlined above.

Once the Virus is able to make an Expectorant Attack, it can do so only for three rounds. By the third round, the parts of the brain that control the voluntary muscles have also turned to mush, and the host-body will fall down in a heap. The autonomic parts of the brain will go next, and then the host-body will cease to function. The slop of its neural material will be infectious for 24 hours, and then burn out.

The host cannot exist for long in its hyperaccelerated state, as the body will be too weakened by the strains put upon it and the virus' urge to reproduce can barely be held back. It has one day of life for every four points in CON that body has after its maximum increase. After that point, it can only hold on for a number of hours equal to its new CON divided by four. Once the time is up, a full-scale replication will take place, and the host-body will die as its neural cells dissolve into gray paste.

Playing the Virus

Psychologically speaking, the virus is an odd sort of creature, but it is still very understandable in its action. It responds

to stimuli based on race memory and instinct that have been tempered by the skills and memories it gains with each new host. It is constantly reevaluating its plans based on that new information.

The virus is a rational and careful thing, but is capable of extreme savagery and callousness if it's trapped or under attack. Each strain recognizes its uniqueness, and, given its extreme need to survive, will do whatever it feels it has to in order to secure its propagation.

Time is a major concern to the virus. Each host body only has so much, so it never spends so much as a moment on anything nonessential. Hygiene, manners, food, and courtesy go by the wayside in favor of speed and economy of action.

It tends to be conscientious about disposing of former host bodies, but not to the point of wasting time. It'll make do with stuffing someone into a trash can rather than digging a grave or arranging for an acid bath. Of course, if a good opportunity for a more air-tight disposal presents itself, it will take full advantage.

The virus was designed to be transmitted through the skin, but if given the choice it would very much like to upgrade itself to airborne status. To this end, the Baxter Strain seems to be intent on absorbing other scientists into itself to achieve this goal.

Story Ideas:

These are some suggestions on how to use the Gaumont Virus in your campaign, or amusing tricks to employ while doing so.

Multivirus

Usually, when the virus passes itself on, it infects only one person at a time. Its goal is always to spread itself out more than that, of course, but caution usually keeps it from attacking more than one potential host unless it has to.

But what happens if it infects more than one person while passing itself on? What happens if it infects one person, and then some poor, passing fellow comes by and touches the former host's brains with a bare hand? And what happens if some deranged scientist decides to inject samples into several victims at once? You will then have two or more Parallel Strains running around in the area, and it can only get worse from there.

The first Iteration of these Strains will have the old memories they shared, plus the new memories of whatever host bodies they've taken. If they're not aware of one another's existence, it's more than likely they'll discover one another as they're sure to cross paths while fulfilling their previous goals. Past that Iteration, it may become less likely, as the absorption of newer minds causes each separate Strain to develop different ideas based on what they learn.

When Strains meet, there's a good chance they'll cooperate, as they are working towards the same purpose. But there's also a chance they might argue over which Strain is better-suited to reproduce itself, and try to destroy one another if they can't come to a suitable agreement. This can lead to some rather amusing existential arguments which will resolve themselves gruesomely.

And I Will Remember You

If the Investigators ever cross swords with a Strain of the virus, but fail to destroy it -- which could be possible if the 'Multivirus' scenario happens without them knowing of it -- it will return to try and do away with them. This isn't so much out of malice as its need to survive: anyone who knows what it is, and what it does, is a risk to its future propagation. They'd do the same thing if their roles were reversed, or so it thinks . . .

Have it split town, wait a few Scenarios, and then have it come back to try and kill them in some sneaky and underhanded way. If it's made the right connections, it might have grabbed someone who can arrange an assassin's

services to do the job for it, too. ("My employer has a message . . . he says to cover your mouth when you sneeze . . .")

You're the Victim

Best employed with your best player, this entails having one of the Investigators becoming infected by the virus, and not having any of the other Investigators -- or their players! -- know that something's up. This works best when the virus has gone through several Iterations already, and has absorbed a great deal of forethought, cunning and subtlety. The player will portray the character as she normally would, but she should be ready to follow your lead.

Pulling off this sort of ploy is pretty tricky in character: the gross physical changes that go on will be difficult to conceal, so the virus will have to be very, very careful. It will also be pretty out of character, too. If you're the sort of Keeper who's constantly taking players out of earshot for brief, secret conferences, showing some players pictures that other players don't get to see just yet, or passing notes here and there, then you can fit your instructions into this framework. With any luck, no one will suspect that anything's awry until it's too late.

If you don't do those sorts of things, however, your sudden spate of passing notes to one player is bound to be noticed. You'll have to find some other way to handle it, like meeting the player in private sometime during the week to discuss plans, or handing her a crib sheet of amusing things to do and working out a series of code words to let her know when to do what.

The other problem with this ploy is that, sooner or later, the virus will use its proximity to these pesky humans to do away with them. Some groups of players don't mind that sort of thing, and consider such in character backstabbing while mind-controlled or impersonated to be part of the paranoia-inducing fun of *Call of Cthulhu*. On the other hand, some groups *do* mind -- a lot. Keep that in mind before unleashing this trick on your players: if you don't think they can handle it, or wouldn't enjoy the bloody denouement, then don't do it.

The Mythos Connection: Serpent People

As far as any human agency knows, the Gaumont Virus was developed by a demented scientist who'd stumbled on the formula by accident. But did mere chance guide Dr. Gaumont's hands, or was there something more at work? Was this ultimately the work of an ancient and sinister threat to Humanity which was waiting for such a chance to strike?

Consider the Serpent People: there are more than a few of these ancient creatures waking up from suspended animation of late. It's no secret that they dislike the jumped-up monkeys who've taken their world away from them, and they would love to see humanity gone, or reduced to the level of cattle once again. But there are so few of them, and so many of us, so how can such a genocidal aim be fulfilled but through sneaky and underhanded methods?

This is where the Serpent People's advanced understanding of poisons comes in. Among their many achievements were a plethora of toxins, virii and other such things, most of which are not known to us even in the present day. Is it possible that Gaumont was influenced to create this virus by one of their number, perhaps disguised as someone Dr. Gaumont knew? And was he pushed to "invent" what was really an age-old recipe of theirs, updated for modern living?

Such a thought might sound overly conspiratorial, but one should remember that the Gaumont Virus is only effective against warm-blooded creatures, and not reptilian lifeforms like the Serpent People. It would make a perfect doomsday weapon for them, then, especially if it went airborne. Presumably they have more samples, which could be why the virus keeps popping up . . .

The Baxter Strain -- 2nd Iteration Gaumont Virus

The samples of the Gaumont Virus that USAMRIID has start with the following stats and skills. Of course, there may be other Strains out there, and Keepers are free to design them.

POW: 16

INT: 17

EDU: 21

Attacks: Expectorant Attack 80%; Fist/Punch 60%; Kick 75%

Relevant Skills: Biochemistry 90%, Biology 85%, Botany 25%, Chemistry 85%, Climb 75%, Conceal 50%, Computer Use 60%, Disguise 40%, Dodge 60%, Hide 30%, Library Use 60%, Medicine 45%, Other Languages: English 90%, French 100%, German 60%, Latin 80%, Pharmacy 90%, Sneak 60%, Spot Hidden 50%

Personality Quirks: Derives enjoyment from seeing animals suffer (Dr. Gaumont); Unwillingness to hurt young girls or put them in danger (Dr. Baxter)

Shared Illuminati

by Brian Joughin

There can be no doubt: *Deluxe Illuminati* is one of the classic games of strategy, subterfuge, politicking, and backstabbing. This variant of the game for four or more players throws a wrench in the works by forcing players to share Illuminati.

Object

This game is similar to *Deluxe* (or *Classic*) *Illuminati*, and works for four or more players. Each player, however, shares partial control of two different Illuminati, with one other player each. When one Illuminatus' conspiracy has fulfilled a winning condition, both players sharing control of that conspiracy win the game.

Setup

An Illuminatus is dealt between each sequentially seated pair of players. This Illuminatus is shared by the two players. If the UFOs are one of the Illuminati in play, the two players on either side of it, who will share control of it over the course of the game, should walk away and jointly decide on its special winning condition. Each Illuminatus has one turn's income placed on it, as normal. Roll dice for each Illuminatus. The highest roll determines the Illuminatus that will go first. As in the normal game, play will proceed counterclockwise by Illuminatus. Shared control requires that play order by player be a little different.

Play

A turn refers to the following basic sequence:

1. The player to the right of an Illuminatus takes an Illuminatus First Action, defined below.
2. The player to the left of the same Illuminatus takes an Illuminatus Second Action, defined below.
3. The dice are passed to the player on the right side of the next Illuminatus to the right.

To illustrate, imagine Alan, Bob, Craig, and Darla are playing Shared Illuminati, and are seated counterclockwise in that order. If The Society of Assassins is between Alan and Bob, The Bavarian Illuminati is between Bob and Craig, The Network is between Craig and Darla, and The UFOs is between Darla and Alan, then the sequence of actions for one round would be as follows:

1. Alan takes an Illuminatus First Action for The UFOs.
2. Darla takes an Illuminatus Second Action for The UFOs.
3. Bob takes an Illuminatus First Action for The Society of Assassins.
4. Alan takes an Illuminatus Second Action for The Society of Assassins.
5. Craig takes an Illuminatus First Action for The Bavarian Illuminati.
6. Bob takes an Illuminatus Second Action for The Bavarian Illuminati.
7. Darla takes an Illuminatus First Action for The Network.
8. Craig takes an Illuminatus Second Action for The Network.

Do note that a given player will **not** be taking two actions consecutively, but will take the first action for one Illuminatus, and the second action for the next Illuminatus, with two actions by other players between them. Theoretically, this makes a player think twice about doing something not to the benefit of one of his Illuminati in an attempt to benefit the second.

Also note that when a card mentions a turn or player's turn, it should be read as an Illuminatus turn in this variant.

Illuminatus First Actions

During an Illuminatus First Action, every player is the controller of the Illuminatus on his or her left. No player has any access to the Illuminatus on his or her right. A player may not use the special cards or abilities of the conspiracy on his or her right, nor may they examine the money or hidden special cards of the conspiracy on his or her right. The player performing the Illuminatus First Action does the following:

1. Take the income of all groups in the conspiracy as normal.
2. Draw a card. If it is a special card, place it face down without showing it to the other controller of the active Illuminatus. Either controller may use or examine that special, but only while they control the conspiracy possessing it.
3. Perform one action and any number of free actions OR place 2 MB on the Illuminatus and proceed immediately to the Illuminatus Second Action.

Illuminatus Second Actions

During an Illuminatus Second Action, every player is the controller of the Illuminatus on his or her right. No player has any access to the Illuminatus on his or her left. A player may not use the special cards or abilities of the conspiracy on his or her left, nor may they examine the money or hidden special cards of the conspiracy on his or her left. The player performing the Illuminatus Second Action does the following:

1. Perform one action and any number of free actions OR put 3 MB on the Illuminatus and end the turn immediately.
2. Perform up to two free money moves only after the nonfree action has been taken, and not if the option to take 3 MB was chosen.

Restrictions

1. No player may use one conspiracy which he shares control of to attack his or her other conspiracy, nor may he or she donate or trade groups, money, or special cards between his Illuminati. This is not quite as restrictive as it may sound, because if such an exchange or attack is to the benefit of the active conspiracy, the conspiracy's **other** controller is free to take it, having no stock in the second conspiracy involved.
2. The target number of an attack may never be raised to greater than 10 or to less than 1 by any player. Without this control, players may (particularly in endgame) decide to spend all of a group's money to make an attack target number arbitrarily large or small in order to prevent his partner from using that funding during the next half-turn.
3. Each group may only participate in one attack per Illuminatus turn. This means that if on an Illuminatus First Action, the Net uses its transferable power to aid an attack, it may not also do so on the corresponding Illuminatus Second Action, despite the fact that another player is in control. The UFOs are, of course, exempt from this restriction.
4. Likewise, any group that has a special ability which may only be activated once per turn, such as the Bavarian Illuminati, may only use that ability once per Illuminatus turn.
5. The special abilities of the Gnomes of Zurich and the Bermuda Triangle, which are normally activated at the end of a turn, may only be activated at the end of an Illuminatus Second Action.

* * *

(Playtested by Brian Joughin, John Cataldo, Craig Brooks, Mathew Cortell, Michael Tuohy, and Aris Yannopoulos)

Pyramid Pick

Legions of Hell (for d20)

Published by [Green Ronin Publishing](#)

Written by Chris Pramas

Illustrated by Brom, Toren Atkinson, Chris Keefe, Raven Mimura, Sam Wood

64 pages; \$14.95

The new Third Edition of *Dungeons & Dragons* brought with it many changes, one of which was the return of both Demons and Devils to the game. Present of course, in *AD&D* 1st Ed -- including both Orcus and Asmodeus, for reasons of political correctness, they were either excised or renamed for 2nd Ed. Which meant one more reason for some to treasure their First Edition hardbacks. Late in the history of the second edition, they began to creep back in, particularly via the *Planescape* campaign setting. In the *Third Edition* the new *Monster Manual* details just nine devils, fiends known as Baatezu, from the Lawful Evil plane of Baator, ranging from the lowly Lemure with a Challenge Rating of one, to the mighty Pit Fiend with its rating of sixteen.

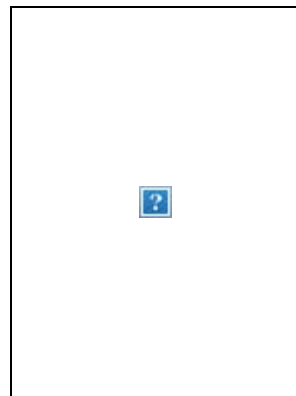
For several publishers of *d20* adventures and supplements, the Baatezu have been popular choices for new monsters to include in their releases, but Green Ronin Publishing have gone several steps further than that. Best known for their *D&D* trilogy of Lovecraft-themed adventures set in the pirate city of Freeport (including the Origins award winning *Death in Freeport*), and built upon the limited range of devils to be found within the *Monster Manual* to publish *Legions of Hell -- Book of Fiends: Volume One*.

The author, Chris Pramas, is no stranger to Hell, having written the *Guide to Hell* for *AD&D 2nd Ed* for WotC in 1999. He draws upon that, as well as other *AD&D* books for this sourcebook, including the original *Monster Manual*, *Monster Manual II*, and *Planes of Law*. All of these *AD&D* sources are listed in the fifth appendix's Bibliography, alongside the list of general sources. A professional touch is the ISBN being provided for every title given in the appendix for anyone who wishes to read further.

This 64-page book contains forty-five entries describing not the actual Lords of the Nine Circles of Hell, but a variety of their minions, from lowly servants and guardians to the nobility and Fallen Celestials. Each receives a whole page, sometimes two, in what is a well-presented, well-laid out book. Every entry is illustrated in sepia tones, and each piece captures the feel of the devil it depicts exceedingly well. What makes the art stand out further is the fact that it is done by five different artists whose styles complement each other's rather well. One niggle that catches the eye is that the occasional piece by Toren Atkinson has clearly been printed in reverse, but then I could just be being picky. Although the cover clearly states that the *Player's Handbook* is required to use this book, the *DMG* is just as much a necessity.

Legions of Hell begins with an introduction to Hell, its layout, and the nature of each of the nine circles and their individual rulers. It describes in general how and why Devils come to the Prime (as the Prime Material Plane is known), the basic qualities of Baatezu, and advises that each of the infernal species described therein is actually the weakest of its type. DMs should therefore customise them according to their campaign's needs, as even the lowliest of devils can advance to the ranks of the nobility. It is also suggested that the more individual minions be equipped with suitable magical items and artefacts.

The entries are arranged alphabetically, but at the lowest end we have the Knocker with a Challenge Rating of 1/2 and



at the other, Iblis, Duke of Pride, with a Rating of 24. Along the way you have Antaia, the Witch Queen; Balan, Master of the Infernal Hunt and his Huntsman; The Faceless, a society of cutthroat assassins that is paid in souls; Kroteo and Nekhet, sibling guards of the realm of the Egyptian god Set, who makes his home on the Fifth Circle; Soulsniffers, which scour Hell for renegade souls; Vierhanders, jesters to the infernal nobility; and Vuall, Duke of Pleasure. The entry for each Devil is given stats in the now familiar Monster Manual format, before describing in detail its history and place in the hierarchy of Hell, any items it is known to wield and its tactics in combat. Some like Antaia, who is worshipped by witches, suggest whole campaigns without even touching upon the possibilities that *Legions of Hell* itself should suggest. Any DM with this in hand should be thinking of ideas of their own for campaigns against the minions of Hell or indeed involving the infighting between them.

Legions of Hell is made complete by with five appendices. The fourth provides a Challenge Rating for all of the entries in the book, and the fifth is the Bibliography. The first gives three new Prestige classes that can be used to create powerful mortal servants of the infernal. These are Balan's Jackal; the Mountebank, servants of the Lich Fiend, Jalie Squarefoot; and the Plaguelord, servant of Nergal, the Fetid Prince. Each new class is accompanied by a sample ready for play. The second appendix details a template, that of the Fallen Celestial, which is applied to an existing creature. Despite Fallen not actually being amongst the Infernal, they have found a place -- sometimes one of power -- within the Nine Circles. This appendix also examines their position within the Hell. The third appendix not only looks briefly at the opposition, the Angelic Choir, but also lists those that have fallen from those heights to Hell.

This sourcebook is packed with useful information that the DM can use to create or enhance their own campaigns. By concentrating upon just one type of creature (though this being Volume One, there is more to come), Green Ronin gives us a very cohesive collection, far more so than other recent books of monsters. Nor is *Legions of Hell* solely applicable to *D&D*. There are several horror RPGs which could make use of this more traditional view of Hell. Not only does this represent excellent value for money, but it is also a darn good sourcebook should the DM (or GM) want to add a little of the infernal to their game.

--Matthew Pook (with thanks to Roj at Wayland's Forge)

Pyramid Review

First Colony: The City of Haven Sourcebook (for Blue Planet)

Written by Greg Benage, Brian Breedlove, Catten Ely, *et al*

Published by [Fantasy Flight](#) (Biohazard Games)

126 pages, B&W hardcover; \$23.95

The folks over at Fantasy Flight have delivered another excellent edition to the *Blue Planet* line with *First Colony*. This book gives us all of the details (and this being a *Blue Planet* book, we mean *all* the details) on Poseidon's first colony of Haven. This book continues Fantasy Flight's track record of very well-written books that are extremely rich in detail.

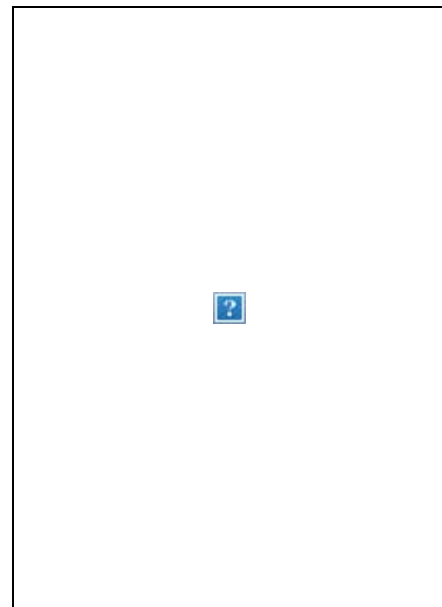
The book's production values are the same as its predecessor, *Fluid Mechanics*. It is 126 black-and-white pages with a full color hardcover. The cover art is incredible (giving us a truly vivid image of the Haven cityscape), and the interior artwork is of the same style and quality as the previous books (though it does seem that there might be just a *tad* more art in this one than the previous ones). The cover price, again, is a bit steep for 126 pages, but when buying a *Blue Planet* book, one pays for quality, not quantity.

The book dives into it in the usual fashion, starting with a map of the outlying area and a synopsis and brief description of the major communities in the outlying area. Here we're talking about Argos Island, the home of Haven and many other smaller settlements. Though not too much is given on the surrounding areas, it is certainly enough for GMs to work with in creating scenarios and looking for places to insert their own concoctions.

An overview of the town is then given, which is followed up by a look at Haven's history and an overview of its culture. The town is divided into nine primary areas, and they run the full gamut, from the high class homes of the Terraces, to the high profile offices of the Central Business District, to the crime-infested back alleys of the Warehouse District. The descriptions of each section talk about its history, its population and culture, its civic make-up, and an overview of the area. These will likely answer any of the questions one wants to know about the major areas of town. The detail level is high, but not so much as to stifle the creative freedom of GMs and players.

Some of the history of Haven was covered in the core books, but this material is revisited in greater detail here, this time focusing on (naturally) Haven and its people. The story is well-told, and it's certainly an engaging background that is ripe for plot and story development by GMs. This material not only does a great job of filling in the mundane details, but it also gives the reader a strong feeling for the people and the culture of Haven and how they have developed.

The book then breaks it down with a look at politics, commerce, culture, and crime. This is important information, which really fills in all the nitty gritty of day to day life -- the meat that GMs are really going to need the most, as their players adventure throughout the city and get into all the many things that players are prone to get into (which is a lot). The Haven political scene is a twisted and dangerous one. In it one finds the mayor, the city council, the GEO, and the movers and shakers from the Incorporate world. Details are given on how things gets done, who gets them done, and just what kinds of things all these people are scheming for. Profiles are also given here for John Bishop, the colonial administrator (aka the GEO top dog on Poseidon) and mayor Jason Blaire -- neither being someone you want to mess with.



The details provided on Haven Commerce are all useful, down-to-Earth (er, Poseidon) kind of things like transportation, retail, financing, manufacturing, health care, and space travel. This is all mundane, everyday material, but it's just the kind of stuff that GMs so often need to fill in the details of their campaigns and give them a real, organic feel. Although this section is very thorough, it does have the effect of leaving you wanting more (which is a good thing, though).

Culture in the city of Haven is a diverse and sometimes crazy thing. The people of this town have their own tastes in everything -- their own art, their own holidays, their own music, and many other things. A solid overview of the culture is provided, as well as a look at several points of interest, like the Greenhouse, Colonial Park, and Haven Coliseum. Whenever your players want a night on the town or whenever you need to give a character or a locale a splash of color, this is the section to turn to.

Crime is something that is most likely going to figure heavily into most campaigns, and this section does a fair job of setting the scene. There are certain areas that are left less detailed, but the *Frontier Justice* sourcebook is bound to fill in whatever this book misses. The overview here focuses on crime in Haven -- what crimes are illegal, what crimes are taken seriously, what crimes are being committed, and details on those committing the crimes and hunting the criminals. Profiles are given here of GEO marshal Peter Church and Vladimir Gorchoff, the head of Poseidon's notorious Gorchoff crime family.

Throughout these sections one will find gray boxed areas that provide extra setting details. There are two primary types: locale profiles and adventure seeds. The locale profiles provide details on some very interesting places in Haven -- just the kind of places the PCs end up at -- and they only make one wish that more details were given. The adventure seeds are done just as there were in the core books, providing a lot of great ideas for adventuring in Haven. Additionally, they give a fair amount of extra details about people and places in Haven that PCs might get the chance to interact with (whether while on these specific adventures or not).

Overall, these first three chapters are written in the same incredible amount of detail of the previous *Blue Planet* books, and they are more than worth the read. There is a veritable treasure trove of material here, and most GMs and players are going to have a great time playing with it.

The adventure section is more of a mixed bag. First, let's say that for the most part these adventures are pretty decent. But they do suffer from one big, huge drawback -- they take up fifty pages of the book. And this is what we would have to call the book's one major flaw. There's nothing wrong with publishing adventure material, and there's nothing wrong with sticking some of it into a sourcebook. But the fact of the matter is that the majority of the material in these fifty pages will only be used once or twice. So fifty pages of what could have been further detail on the huge city of Haven is spent on (what are likely to be) one-shot adventures. This is bound to let a few readers down.

The adventures themselves present a very dynamic batch of episodes that most players will have fun playing. PCs are called upon to do a variety of tasks, from investigating, to manipulating NPCs, to going on treasure hunts. There is a lot of emphasis on roleplaying and character interaction, although there is certainly some room for high-paced action. There is a bit of variation in the writing styles of these adventures, which some may find annoying, but it's certainly nothing that will be hindering at all.

Despite the drawback of having a large portion of the book taken up by adventure material, this is still an excellent sourcebook. Fantasy Flight Publishing continues its tradition of well-thought-out, well-written, and highly detailed source material. For *Blue Planet* GMs wishing to make use of Haven as a setting, this book is an absolute must.

--Jon Thompson

The Hunt For Red Mercury

"Behold a great Mystery which I reveal to you without an enigma; this is the secret of the two mercuries which contain the two tinctures. Keep them separately, and do not confound their species, for fear they should beget a monstrous Lineage."

-- *The Six Keys of Eudoxus*

Ahh, alchemy. There's practically no better field to plow for weird imagery, disturbing symbolism, cool powers, and muttering delusional con-men twitching in the final stages of heavy-metal poisoning. It's a shame it's gone. Except that it isn't; just as we learn from our [ultraterrestrial](#) friends the Grey faeries, myths don't die, they just mutate. Once, alchemists delved deep into forbidden Satanic learning; now, they delve deep into forbidden Soviet learning. Where the alchemist was once a beady-eyed wizard with a cryptical tome in Arabic, he's a beady-eyed physicist with a cryptical tome in Russian. The central concepts -- a paranatural science hidden in the laws of nature, the shadowy evasion of the laws of Man, the promise of unimaginable wealth and power -- all these remain in the modern myth of the techno-chemist. At their center, however, remains the quest, the search for a mysterious substance that bisociates as it eludes -- is it a weapon, a wonder, or a hoax? Follow the trail, then, of the modern Elixir Vitae, the elixir of power known to the modern alchemical underground as Red Mercury.

"I don't want to sound melodramatic, but red mercury is real and it is terrifying. I think it is part of a terrorist weapon that potentially spells the end of organized society."

-- Sam Cohen, former RAND Corp. nuclear weapons adviser

The central legend of Red Mercury holds that Soviet nuclear research spawned this mysterious substance in 1965 in a cyclotron in Dubna, near Moscow. Specifics, of course, vary; the most common version indicates that the experiment had been designed to create implosive fusion, and in some variants, Red Mercury remains the key to clean, plentiful fusion power, suppressed by the Usual Suspects who keep the Dean Drive, the Keely Motor, and the Water Engine from us. More often, however, Red Mercury is an immensely powerful explosive, either a chemical explosive more powerful by weight than any other ("a grenade can sink a battleship; a baseball can destroy a city block"), a key ingredient in "suitcase" nuclear weapons production, or the code name ("red" taken from its Soviet origins) for a brand-new nuclear material more potent than uranium-235 or plutonium-239. Red mercury is also supposed to provide an ultra-stealthy Stealth coating, sonar-proof submarines, enhance infrared sensors, coat money to make it counterfeit-proof, and so forth and so on. It's a floor wax, it's a dessert topping, it's a deadly nuclear material!

"There were an enormous amount of speculations and rumours about red mercury, about mercury fulminate, none of these have any scientific basis in terms of causing the fire. Red mercury may very well exist, in fact red mercury does exist, the contentious issue is whether it plays any role in the nuclear arms sphere. There is no doubt that red mercury exists, I can refer you to the original chemical articles on this particular form of mercury, and there have certainly been a number of unexplained deaths in people who've allegedly been linked to the red mercury industry, not least of which was Alan Kidger."

-- Dr. David J. Klatzow, testifying before the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission on June 1, 1998

And in fact, it is deadly, whether it exists or not. There have been at least 25 documented attempts to sell Red Mercury on the international arms market; involving such delightful people as the Bulgarian, Libyan, North Korean, and South African security services. For a while in 1992 and 1993, Russian vice president Aleksandr Rutskoi announced high-level investigations into Red Mercury export licenses apparently sold to Kremlin insiders (specifically the Ekaterinburg firm Promekologiya), indicating that the Russian mafia has, at the very least, used Red Mercury as a cover for other smuggling activities. This murky world of mafiosi, arms dealers, and spies converged with deadly force in South Africa. Alan Kidger, sales manager for South Africa's Thor Chemicals, Ltd. (according to documents discovered in Iraq in 1992, a possible supplier of Red Mercury) wound up sawn in pieces in the back of his BMW in 1991; unknown parties bludgeoned South African chemical engineer Wynand van Wyk to death in Cape Town two years later. (Two arms dealers and a military intelligence officer have also died in potentially related incidents.) Intriguingly, Kidger died two months after Thor Chemicals sold over two tons of "yellow mercuric oxide" to a South African Defense

Forces shell company known (and I swear this is true, *Call of Cthulhu* fans) as "Delta G Scientific." This stuff just writes itself some days.

"This is the unicorn of modern science. You can put your hand on a Kalashnikov, you can touch plutonium. With red mercury, there just doesn't seem to be anything there. Call it red mercury, call it a Big Mac. I call it a scam."

-- Vic Hogsnett, Los Alamos analyst

So, really, what's going on? The "official" chemical formula for Red Mercury is $\text{Hg}_2\text{Sb}_2\text{O}_7$, mercury antimony oxide; enhanced with either radioactive lutetium or (less probably) californium, it might emit enough neutrons to fool a geiger counter or a desperate Iraqi general for a while. John Hassard, a lecturer in nuclear physics at Imperial College, has even theorized that a "lattice" of mercury and antimony atoms might be able to contain plutonium for a much more efficient implosion. There is also a "red oil" (actually an exothermic tri-n-butyl phosphate) that forms on nuclear waste tanks and can (as in the Tomsk-7 accident in 1993) cause them to explode. The actual confiscated "Red Mercury" smuggled by various lowlives ranges all over the periodic table, from pure mercury (tinted with cochineal, brick dust, or nail polish), depleted nuclear reactor fuel, chloride of mercury, mercuric iodide, mercuric oxide, and mercuric cyanate. Some of these compounds have uses in nuclear engineering; mercuric cyanate is a fairly powerful explosive rocket fuel in its own right. Journalist Craig Copetas theorizes that Red Mercury is actually mercury-antimony waste powder used to cool a Soviet plutonium breeder reactor. The powder is known as "redistilled mercury," or "red. mercury" for short. The US Department of Energy is even more cynical. A DOE 1992 report began with this snarky recipe: "Take a bogus material, give it an enigmatic name, exaggerate its physical properties and intended uses, mix in some human greed and intrigue, and voila: one half-baked scam." But for our purposes, it's more fun to take the same ingredients and produce a fresh-roasted adventure.

"Others have taught that the White Mercury is the bath of the Moon, and that the Red Mercury is the bath of the Sun. But there are none who have been willing to show distinctly to the Sons of Science by what means they may get these two mercuries. If you apprehend me well, you have the point already cleared up to you. The Lunaria is the White Mercury, the most sharp Vinegar is the Red Mercury; but the better to determine these two mercuries, feed them with flesh of their own species -- the blood of innocents whose throats are cut; that is to say, the spirits of the bodies are the Bath where the Sun and Moon go to wash themselves."

-- *The Six Keys of Eudoxus*

And that's the kind of remix that we call alchemy. It's intriguing, in light of Vic Hogsnett's metaphor above, that the unicorn was one of the medieval alchemists' symbols for mercury. Mercury played a central role in alchemy, both Eastern and Western. In China, the great alchemists quested after the "true cinnabar medicine," cinnabar being mercury sulfide, the most common ore of mercury (and another frequent substance traded as "Red Mercury" by unscrupulous Siberian dealers). In the West, mercury and sulfur were the only two earthly elements, from which all other metals were constructed. Mercury's changeable liquid nature, and its mythological connection with the trickster god of language, magic, theft, and transformation, gave it a crucial symbolic role in almost all stages of conventional Western alchemical practice. It begins as the Prime Materia (a distinction sometimes shared with our old pal antimony, the alchemical "wolf of metals"), is a repeated ingredient in purification, and sometimes becomes the final Stone: the Elixir Vitae, Red Elixir, or Philosopher's Mercury. The Philosopher's Mercury has become the Physicist's Mercury with barely a ripple, possibly connecting at the point in 1941 when physicists Sherr and Bainbridge successfully used fast neutrons to transmute mercury to gold. Red Mercury is also called "2020", allegedly from its density (20.20) in grams per cubic centimeter. In that context, it's interesting to note that 20, kabbalistically, can mean either "golden" or "black liquid"; mercury itself (KSPYTh) is 570, the same as "Moloch," "earthquake," or "gate." Demons, explosions, and gateways -- yep, that's Red Mercury all over.

"Thus in January 1996, Ptah instructed me in Luxor about the deactivation of the Amen-Ra crystal computers under Thebes, which still held many soul hologrammes captured, by the red mercury, Heku magick etc.."

-- Ananda, *Shemsu Hor: The Hall of Records*

And you can drizzle Red Mercury all over your game (just as someone drizzled black mercury liquid all over Alan Kidger's exsanguinated body). It can be a prime McGuffin for a gritty game of espionage, a vital ingredient in the Warehouse 23 medicine chest, the "mystery substance" that allows some Steampunk genius to develop nuclear

explosives or etheric transformers, or the key to Illuminated technology controlled by the Men In Black or the UFOs. It's already shown up in reports of UFO combat, in fact, since the SADF allegedly shot down a UFO over Lesotho on September 15, 1995 using a revolutionary Thor-2 MASER developed at (wait for it) Thor Chemicals Ltd. Could Red Mercury be the key to Majestic-12's dangerous covert war against our alien masters? Could U-859, sunk in the Straits of Malacca in 1944 with 33 tons of mercury on board, have been carrying Red Mercury to [Hitler's Antarctic base](#) to fuel the Nazi flying saucer fleet there? Heck, why stop there? According to the *Cairo Times*, at least one enterprising Egyptian smuggler tried to sell Red Mercury as "demon food" -- could that be the source of the Red King of alchemical legend? Or does Eudoxus' prescription, to feed Red Mercury "the blood of innocents whose throats are cut" tie our alchemical bisociate compound rather to a [Red Jack?](#) Does the Elixir Vitae spawn a monstrous Lineage indeed, bringing forth demonic life into the bloodstream of its unfortunate consumer? Could Red Mercury tear open the doors of spacetime, imploding dimensions themselves in a technomantic Hellstorm of hypergoetic proportions? There's only one way to find out -- hunt down some Red Mercury, and set off your game with a bang.

Oh, the Humanity

We'd been escorted into the Vampire Prince's lair. Through the underground tunnels, past the security checkpoints, deep below the living city we traveled. We were being granted a great "honor" to visit the lair of the vampires, since we were lowly humans. Oh, sure, we had some powerful tricks up our sleeves, but we were essentially normal mortals. No doubt there would be tense negotiations with these undead vipers; could a mutually satisfactory resolution be reached to the crises facing the city?

The GM says, "Okay; you're standing before the Vampire Prince. He seems to be waiting for you to act. What do you do?"

I say, "I need to go to the bathroom."

He says, "Well, go ahead; it's down the hall."

I say, "No; my character. I say, 'I need to go to the bathroom.' To the Prince. I mean, we'd been wandering under the catacombs of the city for a couple hours, right? And this is the first time we've had a chance to stop, as best I can tell. I need to go to the bathroom."

"What are you trying to pull?"

After a bit of wrangling, I managed to assure the GM that, indeed, my character merely wished to relieve himself. So, heavily guarded, our vampire guards struggled to find me a place to do such. After all, they wouldn't have a proper restroom; it's a scientific fact that the walking dead do not need to pee, and as such their lairs would not have those facilities.

In one gesture, I (as a player) managed to do two things.

One, I gave the other player the first "real" interaction with the Prince. He was somewhat shy as a player, and would usually allow other players to speak first (and, often, exclusively). But when coaxed he was a *good* player, and the scene was made more interesting after that because he was put on the spot in a very natural way. But that's not what this column's about.

Two, I helped remind everyone that my character is human; for the integrity of the scene and action I felt it was important to emphasize that. After all, if the only difference between humans and the walking dead is the dress code, then neither faction is terribly interesting. And sometimes the simplest actions are what "being human" is all about.

Despite what William Shatner may proclaim whilst surrounded by Styrofoam rocks, being human is *not* just about the quality of mercy, the bravery of man against impossible odds, and the power of love. Being human is about plucking hairs that grow in strange places. It's trying to keep yourself from inappropriately laughing at a funeral. It's about forgetting where your keys are, right as you need to head out the door. It's about finding them in your *other* pocket, five minutes later.

Perhaps my favorite scene illustrating humanity's ability to erupt, even when we don't want it to, is from the movie *The English Patient*. In that scene Kristin Scott Thomas (played by Kristin Scott Thomas) had just broken up with Ralph Fiennes (played by John Steed) while the two of them were under the bleachers of a movie theater. After the confrontation was over, Kristin -- teary-eyed and emotionally wrought -- walks away from Fiennes while looking back at him . . . and conks her head on one of the bleacher's support beams. Clutching her hurt head, she manages to stagger away, doubly whimpering from the emotional and physical impact of the scene.

(Actually, it's probably my favorite scene from the whole movie, and certainly one of the only ones I can remember with any clarity. I seem to recall a lot of sand . . . and a CGI mummy. Or maybe I'm thinking of a different film.)

Anyway, it's the little things we do (or don't do) as people that make us human. And it's when those things aren't present -- or are different -- that help separate the inhuman from us.

For example, when we played *Changeling*, one of our characters (a beautiful Sidhe noble) had an Appearance attribute of six. We were having a hard time wrapping our minds around what that would look like (since the highest human rating is five), until I made a realization. Imagine the most beautiful Hollywood celebrity you can. Now try to recall photos of that person which have appeared in the tabloids. No matter how beautiful that person is, there will be photos where he is unattractive. He might look strange in a bathing suit, he might be looking exhausted or drunk as he walks down the street in the middle of the night, or he might be trying to keep the photographer from taking pictures of his family. There will be photos of the person in inappropriate poses, mouth open at a weird angle, hands outstretched in an odd gesture, and just generally begging to have silly captions added.

There *are* no photos like that for someone with an unearthly appearance. That photo of the person sneaking out of a convenience store with three pints of Ben & Jerry's? It's a gorgeous person perfectly holding a paper bag, looking nobly irked. The picture of them in the rain? He looks great, like a romantic painting on film. And so on.

Beings with other inhumanly high levels of attributes are the same way.

An inhumanly strong being has *no* pause when opening up an old, stuck jar. It opens like a well-oiled closet door.

An inhumanly dexterous being *never* trips, loses his footing, clips his toe on the corner of the bed, and so on.

An inhumanly intelligent person can think as fast as he can speak; he doesn't pause to collect his thoughts, say, "Um, er," or the like. At a press conference, this person could point at a questioner, immediately reply with 100% accuracy, and point to someone else. There would *never* be an instance where someone could question him about the factuality of a quote . . . he is *always* correct.

And so on.

Inhumanity means not human; being human means sometimes doing some stupid, illogical, or random things. If you want your elves to be something other than pointy-eared long-lived humans, give them some inhuman quirks. Not sneezing, for example. Or answering truthfully when asked, "How are you?" Or needing to trim their earlobes.

And if you want to emphasize your own humanity, do human things every so often. Contrariwise, if you want to emphasize your own lack of (or declining) humanity, fail to do human things. People take whiffs of something awful smelling (like spoiled milk), express disgust, then offer it to someone else to smell. People say "Ow!" and curse when they take some minor (often self-inflicted) damage. People walk away with pens when they borrow them from stores.

And people often need to go to the bathroom . . . often at inopportune times.

--*Steven Marsh*

* * *

Last week's answer: Legend of the Five Rings Diskwars: Ancestral Home of the Lion

(*Five stars*) "Whose fingerprint is that on the champagne bottle lying on the floor? Are any prints other than the owner's found on the empty cash box in the closet? And do these prints match those of any of the seven guests invited to the showing?"

Designer's Notes: GURPS Screampunk

by Jo Ramsay

"More Swooning, and Less Regurgitation!"

From the outset, *GURPS Screampunk* was intended to be an unholy mixture of gothic horror and steampunk. Mixing genres has a lot in common with cooking; when it works, the results look spectacular and taste great! When it doesn't, you can add more spices and turn it into a curry ("What if we added characters from childrens' TV series?"), and if it fails spectacularly then there's always the option of calling out for a pizza (in gaming terms, this probably means playing *Star Trek* instead). To string the metaphor out, if the mix works, then the individual "taste" of each of the ingredients is detectable in the results, and they subtly enhance each other, creating a much more exotic dish than either alone.

I looked hard at the themes behind the component genres, cutting them back to basics and trying to work out which pieces were most compatible, or most incompatible. What is it that gives steampunk/gothic horror its distinctive "feel"? Do they share any assumptions? Are they set in the same world/country/time period? Do the themes coincide on any level?

In this case, they are both based on literatures from similar periods. The overlap isn't perfect, because the classic period for gothic novels was 1750-1820, whereas steampunk isn't really a genre (or even subgenre) but the Victorian idiom is rooted in the 1838-1910 period. Having said that, the cinematic GM is free to pick and mix elements from all over the 18th-19th century, turning them into one glorious melodramatic whole! There is precedent.

Gothic horror is a genre so well known and understood that almost everything about it has become a cliché. This might be a bad thing if the aim was to win prizes for originality, but for roleplaying it is a gift. A major communication barrier in setting up a successful game is in both players and GM sharing an understanding about the nature and assumptions behind the game world. Any GM who has ever tried to run a game in a particularly exotic or unusual backdrop with players who weren't interested in absorbing pages of game-history will be familiar with the problem. Traditionally, the solution is to introduce the players/PCs to the game world slowly, one small piece at a time.

A Victorian game is set in a world that is both like and unlike our own. But the classic plots, characters, and atmosphere of gothic horror are so familiar that players have a head start in understanding "in their bones" what the game is all about, without needing to do extra research (i.e. work). One of the objects of screampunk was to break down gothic horror into sets of common themes, locations, plots, and NPCs, to help GMs to put together scenarios that hit all the *right* clichés. But what about the steampunk? There's no real conflict between the genres in terms of atmosphere or theme, because steampunk stories can just as easily be dark and gloomy as they can be optimistic. Gothic steampunk is therefore a darkly painted vision . . .

Invariably, with such a tight word-limit, there were fragments of stillborn text-boxes that were excised before their time. The paragraph below, about the nefarious ways in which experimenters acquired human corpses, was prompted by the death fetish that infuses a lot of gothic work. Much of this stems from the "graveyard poets" who wrote morbid, lyrical verse about the futility of life towards the end of the 18th century.

Invasion of the Body Snatchers

From renaissance times, dissection of cadavers became a regular feature of medical schools. Legal ways to acquire corpses involved paupers selling their physical remains to medical schools before they died, and the acquisition of the corpses of criminals who had either been sentenced to capital punishment or died in prison. There were never enough corpses to meet demand, and eager researchers traditionally paid various unsavory characters to visit cemeteries and abscond with the bodies of the recently deceased. In the late 18th century, public anatomy lectures became very

popular, and the demand for bodies in good condition rose. Grave robbing was a profitable and widespread phenomenon -- to combat this, people added extra security features and traps to their tombs, as well as employing security guards in graveyards.

The laws of demand and supply meant that in the case of some poor people, they were literally worth more dead than alive, and criminals moved in to take advantage of them. The most notorious body snatchers of all were Burke and Hare, who became procurers for Edinburgh's medical school. They murdered people (carefully, to keep the bodies in good condition) and sold corpses to the local medical schools on a no questions asked basis. At least 16 people were killed before they were apprehended, in 1829.

The gothic fascination with death meant that grave robbing became firmly established in fiction of the time, either directly (as in Robert Louis Stevenson's "The Body Snatchers"), or implied as a way for an inventor to acquire human parts (as in Mary Shelley's "Frankenstein.")

Scientific Societies from the Victorian World

To give characters more real world grounding, scientific societies of the time were also discussed. The Royal Society and the SPR made it into the final cut. The two institutions below ended up in the great recycling bin in the sky because they are limited to professional engineers, whereas any interested members of the public could feasibly attend the ones that ended up in the book.

The Institute of Civil Engineers

Founded to raise standards of education among engineers, the ICE was (and is) a learned society that only allowed membership to professionals (as opposed to any interested member of the public). It quickly built up a library, and catered to members with technical meetings, journals, and regular transactions, as well as being involved in the development of standards. Practitioners gathered to discuss "best practice" and to investigate civil engineering projects that had failed in interesting and educational ways. Initially, the society was not a great success, but its fortunes improved when Thomas Telford, the Scottish engineer who built the Menai Bridge, and a man of many influential contacts, was able to secure a royal charter. By the end of the Victorian era, the Institution had become a wealthy organization, maintaining a plush headquarters in London that included conference rooms that could hold 600 people.

The International Telegraph Union

The first telegraph message was sent by Samuel Morse in 1844 between Baltimore and Washington -- less than ten years later, the technology was available to the general public. At this time, different countries used their own systems and telegraph codes, so the lines could not cross national boundaries without being decoded, transcribed, and formally handed over at frontiers. It became obvious that interconnection agreements between countries were required. On 17th May, 1865, the first International Telegraph Convention was signed by 20 participating European countries after long and arduous debates. It laid down rules for standardized equipment to *guarantee* interconnection, and standard tariff and accounting rules. An International Telegraph Union (ITU) was set up to allow amendments to the convention to be discussed and agreed upon. The ITU was an international forum, holding conferences across the globe where experts from many states could meet and discuss common issues. During the 20th century, it evolved into the most prominent telecommunication standards body in the world.

Character Types

As well as the classic hero and villain types, there are a host of minor figures, familiar through countless novels and films, who "belong" in gothic stories. After all, where would the genre be without the pale innocent heroine, the sinister servant, the debauched aristocrat, or the vengeful scientist? Others were added to better support the industrial and scientific side of steampunk. Originally I considered using templates to present the supporting cast, but this was quickly dropped for two reasons.

1. They take up valuable space.
2. *GURPS Steampunk* already includes templates for many of the common Victorian character types.

Instead, the NPC stereotypes had a much shorter format, with a brief description, suggested advantages and disadvantages, and a typical quote. This one was cut for space, and because we weren't entirely sure whether it was too English an idiom. In cases like this where there is already a relevant template in *GURPS Steampunk*, it has been referenced. But there should be enough information in the text for readers who don't own *GS* to fill in the blanks themselves.

The Corrupt Industrialist

He may be a multi-millionaire but the corrupt industrialist is morally bankrupt. He uses and abuses the men who work his factories, and cares for nothing except the bottom line, and his own excesses. He has no breeding, no gentility, and no understanding of *noblesse oblige* -- in short, despite his business success, he is no gentleman and will likely never be accepted by decent society.

Template: Captain of Industry (p. STM32)

Customization Notes: Disadvantages include Reputation (nouveau riche), Sadism, Enemy (business rivals) and Megalomania, and common quirks are "Speaks with a strong regional accent", and "no fashion sense." Skills include Intimidation and Accounting. Other than this, the Captain of Industry template fits very closely. As a gothic villain, he may also have Unnatural Feature, or a Disturbing Voice.

Most likely to say: *"Where there's muck, there's brass!"* (in a Yorkshire accent)

Plot Seeds

At the end of the day, someone has to bring the plot elements, locations, ideas, and characters together, and the hope with plot seeds is that they provide quick examples of how the elements of screampunk may be combined. Again, space was tight, and this seed was cut for space.

Plot Seed: The Dead Man's Hand

Hook: One or more characters receives telegrams from friends or business contacts in Scotland, with unusual footnotes appended to them. Telegrams may be from different people, but the footnotes are all in the same style, either purporting to be from someone known to be dead, or referring to events that happen after the note has been received. In each case, the sender knows nothing about the footnote. Messages in the newspapers indicate that at least one other person has received similar footnotes, and is looking for other people in the same situation.

Background: Thomas Blandell, a criminal mastermind, plots to intercept the main London-Newcastle telegraph line, so as to send false information to Scotland Yard. This will allow him to carry out a series of increasingly daring thefts, including that of official information that he will sell to the French! Unfortunately, skilled telegraph operators can easily recognize each other by their "fists," which makes it difficult to effect a substitution, or "tap" messages partway along the line.

One of the telegraph operators from a remote station was kidnapped and blackmailed into agreeing to substitute messages. Unfortunately, he turned out to be a drunk who had to be quickly dispatched before he revealed the plan to his drinking friends. Desperate not to lose track of his plan, Blandell arranged for a disreputable surgeon friend to transplant one of the man's hands onto Pine, a minion who believed he was getting "new fingerprints." The surgeon swore that this experimental procedure would result in the hands being "as good as if they were still attached to the original owner", and was well rewarded for his pains. The transplant took very well, and as hoped, the right hand's new possessor had inherited the previous owner's skill at telegraphy. And, of course, his "fist."

Pine was able to substitute himself for the dead operator, having excused his absence on a grandmother's funeral, and began to intercept messages. However, the hand is having a dreadful effect on his mental state. He suffers terrible

nightmares, and hallucinations, as well as memory lapses in which he has become convinced that he goes on murderous rampages. In addition, the hand adds footnotes to telegrams of its own accord, some of which actually point obliquely to Blandell as his murderer.

The writer of the newspaper advert is a private detective whose client has shown him the odd footnotes. He is curious to investigate, but needs more information . . .



Feed the Tree

by Jo Ramsay

Introduction

This is an old-fashioned ghost story, heavily influenced by M R James. It would work as a one-shot for a group of PCs who share some friends, or are willing to spend a few weeks helping a young woman to decorate her house for bed and board, and a small fee.

For an explanation of the Iron Ref rules and a list of the secret ingredients, please see the [Introduction](#).

Plot Hook

One of the PCs gets a phone call from an old school friend, Elizabeth. She swaps anecdotes about college and family, before informing him excitedly that she has just inherited a large old house from her great-aunt! "Oak Arbor Cottage" is a bit run down, and she wondered if the character would like to spend a couple of weeks helping her to redecorate and catch up on old times. It could be a quiet holiday, as the local countryside is very beautiful, and she'd be more than happy to cover any travel expenses. It'd be fun! If the PC wants to bring any friends, that's fine too, and she'd love to meet them.

Elizabeth sounds a little too keen. Her voice has a breathless quality, either of excitement, or of trembling desperation. If pressed, she admits that she finds the place a bit spooky on her own, and would really like to have some people around. She doesn't give any details, only mentioning that she's been having bad dreams, and that she had a nasty argument with the cleaning lady about one of the bedrooms that has been preying on her. If the PC is still reluctant, Elizabeth begs him, trying hard to conceal her sobs on the other end of the line. Whatever she saw or dreamed, it has left her terrified of being alone.

Events Unfold

The journey is uneventful, and the group are able to finally reach the small village of Shady Springs, an old rural settlement that is being overtaken by the forces of progress. The local pub is in the process of being turned into a smart bar and a couple of fast food joints have recently opened. Genuine locals are cautious of strangers, but can be coaxed into remembrances of Elizabeth's great-aunt (the old cottage's previous owner) who was well-liked in the area. Oak Arbor Cottage itself has an unlucky reputation; PCs may be able to winkle out the old story that a woman once committed suicide there.

The final stage of the trip is via car or cab down narrow country roads. The sun is just beginning to set when Oak

Arbor Cottage comes into view, set into an acre of garden, with high walls and a long driveway. The house itself is tall and menacing, casting long dark shadows onto the wooden front porch; the main building is built in a different style to the two wings and is clearly much older. Lights are on in the downstairs windows, and Elizabeth herself comes out to meet her guests when she hears the car arriving. She looks much as the PC who knew her remembered, allowing for the passage of time, but has dark rings under her eyes that speak volumes about lack of sleep. An older man with reddish hair also helps PCs with their bags, and Elizabeth introduces him as her cousin Rick who was able to come down at short notice the previous day. Rick is a large, jolly fellow who laughs at his own jokes, and gives the group a quick tour of the house. The main section is at least 200 years old, and the two side-wings were added at later dates. It's been in the same family since the late 19th century, and there are still boxes of papers and old effects in the cellars. Rick pauses briefly outside one door, jerking a thumb as he comments that this was the old locked room that the cleaning woman made such a fuss about it. It's also the room he is sleeping in. The group are assigned rooms in the right wing. The decor is fussy and old fashioned, with prints and trinkets that an old lady might have chosen, but the beds are well-aired and seem comfortable. After people have installed themselves in bedrooms, it is time for dinner.

It's The Lady's Room

Elizabeth is happy to have old friends around and becomes quite chatty as the food and wine are passed around. She admits that her dreams had been troubled lately, filled with images of creeping and squeaking things. If anyone asks about the locked room, she explains that when she first arrived to sort out her great-aunt's possessions, one bedroom was locked. It was when she asked the cleaning lady to open it that the woman stormed out of the house, saying that "it's the lady's room and should be left to her." Elizabeth cleaned it up herself; it had evidently not been touched in a very long time but must have once been a woman's boudoir. She had slept there for a couple of nights, but not very soundly, and was relieved to surrender it to Rick when he arrived. He, needless to say, slept like a log the previous night.

After dinner, as people are sitting out on the porch and chatting, there is a scream from the kitchen. As characters enter, they see Elizabeth with her hand across her mouth, staring wildly at a dark object on the floor. It is a piece of chocolate -- with a group of large wriggling leggy spiders clustered across it. The woman is as pale as a sheet, and very shaken. She found them in the pantry as she was clearing up, and as she accepts a shot of brandy, she peers up at characters wanly and whispers that the spiders were **huge**, and that they weren't in there before. She demands that characters kill all of the spiders, and will not enter the kitchen again until she is assured that this is done.

The pantry is a food storage cupboard; there aren't any obvious holes in the door but there are cracks in the wall and it's possible that something might have got in under the door. There are no spiders inside it currently.

Timescales

Elizabeth's nightmares get steadily worse over the next couple of nights. If she is persuaded to move back into the lady's room, then she also takes to sleepwalking, ending up in the garden outside. Any female PCs also experience bad dreams, characterised by the feeling of insectoid creatures crawling over and inside her. If one of the women sleeps inside that room at any time after the third night, then her time has run out -- see "A night to forget."

Investigations

1. Finding out more about the history of the house.

Possible avenues include asking the cleaning woman (who turns up punctually every day at 11am), searching through the old boxes in the cellar, paying a visit to the local church or graveyard, asking around in Shady Springs to find a local historian, or any other viable method of research in such a remote location.

The infamous suicide was Elizabeth Larson, a young bride who was found hanged from one of the garden oaks in 1863, when she heard that her husband had been killed in the civil war. Apparently she also smothered her young baby

daughter, burying the child somewhere on the grounds before killing herself.

The locked boudoir had once been Elizabeth's, but it was locked long after her death. In fact, two other women had died in the same bedroom, both of whom had previously been in good health. In neither case were suspicious circumstances involved. One fell through the window, stabbing herself on a glass shard, and the other had an unexpected heart attack. The deaths occurred before the new wings were built, and the bedroom was considered so unlucky that it was then locked up.

If characters search the "locked" bedroom carefully, they may find an old family bible that is hidden under a loose floorboard. It belonged to Elizabeth Larson, and tucked inside the pages are yellowed letters between herself and her husband. The last few letters were obviously never sent, and speak plaintively about how she is trying to love the new baby, and she wishes that he would hurry home, and that she tied a yellow ribbon onto the tree, and doesn't he remember that he swore he would come back for her?

2. Spiders?

It's a country house. There are spiders, but they are small and harmless. There may be larger creatures in the trees outside, and the blasted oak in particular has huge cobwebs in its remaining branches. It is (or was) the largest tree in the garden, but was hit by lightning many years ago. Fanciful characters (or those with good hearing) may hear rustling inside it, as of creatures moving around.

This Way Out

Characters can avert the coming crisis in several ways. Destroying the blasted oak and its roots will reveal the tiny bones of a newborn baby, buried with a bible -- giving these a Christian burial will appease local spirits. Persuading Elizabeth to sell up, move out, or demolish the house will also destroy the ghost's link with her and the building. But if none of these things happen, move swiftly on to the next paragraph.

A Night To Forget

Three days later, the weather turns dark and stormy. Rain lashes down against the windows in rivulets of tears, and dusk comes early. If PCs have been making efforts to uncover the mysteries of the house, both Elizabeth and Rick are much cheered -- the findings might have been dark and dismal, but at least they are among friends. And who really believes in local superstitions anyway? Drink flows freely at dinner and after a late night of chatting, cards, and board games, everyone retires to bed.

But on this night, no-one sleeps soundly.

At 3am, a piercing scream shatters the silent house. It is a sound of primal animal terror, as of a soul in Hell, and it is coming from Elizabeth's room. Then, as suddenly as it began, the cry is cut short. Characters all arrive at the room together, and when the door is opened, a flock of small velvety bats flutters out in a panicked rush, filling the corridor outside. Along the ground, spiders scuttle out of the bedroom as well. The bedroom itself is dark, and a prone figure lies half on and half off the bed. When a light is turned on, terrified bats flutter madly as they search for an exit, becoming entangled in hair and clothes, and large spiders stream toward the shadows. Elizabeth herself is quite dead, and quite naked, clutching only an old yellow ribbon in her left hand.

From out of the window, the old blasted oak glows eerily in the moonlight. The young soldier has returned yet again to claim his bride.



Planet of the GenCon Report: Wednesday

MILWAUKEE -- Gather 'round the fire everybody. We're all friends here by now. You remember me. I'm your old pal, Micah. I appear at this time each year to lead you deep into the adventure that is GenCon. Whether you're on the floor yourself, too busy playing games 24 hours a day to make it, or forced to work a regular job like one of those "adults" we keep hearing so much about, I'll be your guide.

As I'm sure you know, we're closing in on the end of the line for GenCon in Milwaukee. Come 2003, I'll be reporting from Indianapolis instead. And that's not all. Origins, the other big gaming con, is coming up fast and giving this old war-horse a run for its money. So, GenCon management can be expected to be working awfully hard this year to make sure people have a good time, and plan to return. I'm not saying that means they'll be giving away free Pez, but you never can tell.

And don't forget that convention management is not the only bunch with a reputation on the line. Game companies come to Milwaukee with their newest designs, just hoping to catch a breakout hit, or at least enough sales to keep it together another year. And the gamers themselves, thousands upon thousands of them, are all looking to get over on their opponents. All I can say is, don't tap on the glass. They get aggressive.

New and Notable

Last year the game on everybody's shopping list was *Dungeons and Dragons 3e*. There isn't such an obvious hit this year, but there will be plenty of new products to keep this column running. White Wolf will have two big ones, *Exalted*, which bowed at Origins, and *Adventure*, a pulp action game, new at this show. Our own Steve Jackson Games will be showing *Frag* and *Munchkin* for the first time. And I'm certain that there's an entrepreneurial gamer in his or her garage right now putting the finishing touches on something that we'd never expect. You'll read about them all here.

Blast from the Past

There are a lot of traditions surrounding GenCon. The Thursday night party hosted by WotC, the late night LARPS, the Klingons with Coke bottle glasses. But one such tradition has sadly ended. Kid's Place, the child-care program that I praised in this very column last year, and which went a long way toward making convention attendance a possibility for families, will not be present this year. Rumors abound, but no solid information is forthcoming about whether or not it will be back. In any case, adults and children alike will miss it.

Also between last GenCon and this one, FASA Corp, justly famous for such great games as BattleTech, Shadowrun, and so many others, shut its doors. They always had a giant mural above their booth, which could be seen throughout the floor. This year, there will be only cinder blocks where it once hung. Will FASA co-founder Jordan Weisman's new company, WizKids (*Mage Knight: Rebellion*), step up to fill the void?

Seen Around Town

Hey, what's that? A gaming industry professional -- with time enough to game? That's right, my friends. This is the place where we report all the amazing and unlikely things spotted around the convention. One thing I plan to see this year is the special, invitation only, designers demonstration game of White Wolf's new release, *Adventure: The Storytelling Game of Pulp Action*. The average gamer won't get to see this session, personally led by former Black Hand master Storyteller, Ray Davis. But you're not an average gamer. You read *Pyramid*. Look for the report of this game in Saturday's issue of GenCon Report.

Heard on the Street

A popular T-shirt at GenCons past reads, "Don't tell me about your character." Well, with all these games going on, there just have to be some good stories, both true and fictional, floating around. I'll gather the best ones together and bring them to you, with just the right mix of skepticism and suspension of disbelief that makes our hobby so much fun.

Dark of the Night

Truth to tell, this is the most dangerous section of GenCon report to research each day. With gaming and partying going on 24 hours a day, I'm often hard pressed to get the story written and sent to *Pyramid* before passing out long enough to do it all again the next day. But you didn't come here for my whining. I'm strong and dedicated to my craft. I'll be in all the usual hangouts, the Hyatt's second floor bar, the LARP wing, the Secret LocationTM, anyplace where the action continues after the weak (or lucky) are already in bed.

And it should be worth it. Among other late-night classics, the Munchausen invitational continues for a second year, this time featuring Guests of Honor Baron and Baroness Phil and Kaja Foglio (you guess which is which), Lord Mubday himself, John Kovalic, and as always, Doc Cross.

By The Numbers

Origins attendance figures were down quite a bit this year. Will that trend continue, and take a significant bite out of the now traditional 25,000 attendees at this "granddaddy of all gaming cons?" Or will it be able to hang on? We'll try to pry the results from the brains of convention managers and report them in this space.

Well, so much for the tale of the tape. Thursday morning the convention gets underway in earnest, and we'll all get a look at what GenCon is like in the 21st century. I'll be around the dealer's room, the gaming halls, and local taverns throughout. If you're at the show, stop me to say "hi" or to tell me your convention story if you think it would make a good read for the other *Pyramidians*. If you couldn't make it this year, don't worry. Check in every morning to read the latest from GenCon. And come in Monday evening under the *Pyramid* for the GenCon Wrap-Up chat. As always, I'm taking story suggestions, requests, and comments at genconreport@hotmail.com. And remember, be they the humble six-sider, the ubiquitous twenty-sider, or the mighty Zocchihedron -- may the dice go your way.



Fort Sumter Syndrome

A Sci-Fi Recipe by Sandy Antunes

Setting

Welcome to the future. Trading companies like The Lighthouse Authority (TLA) make good money in their role as go-betweens for such desirable commodities as spices, chocolate, crops -- just about anything.

For an explanation of the Iron Ref rules and a list of the secret ingredients, please see the [Introduction](#).

The Crisis

Historically, Fort Sumter protected the waterways into Charleston, South Carolina. While in Union hands, it was the site of the first US Civil War battle. The Confederates took it and then, in the year 1863, held it over a 22 month siege that reduced it to rubble. Restored as a historical monument in the 20th century, it was purchased in the 21st century by TLA for use as a minor trade station with access to southern farmlands.

Like all TLA ports, it emphasizes quaint charm, minor defensive strength, and low cost. With a minimal staff of 16, it relies on mutual need and a nice bank of repeating railguns for survival. Ah, the advantages of rebuilding Confederate forts with 21st century technology.

Unfortunately, Fort Sumter/Lighthouse Outpost #37 faces its latest crisis. Its crew has triggered the Emergency Lock Out and is not responding to calls.

[Alternative settings: Anywhere you can stick a trading station!]

The Starting Point

The characters arrive just outside of Lighthouse Outpost #37, with the explicit goal of finding out why the trade station is shut down. Likely they are the advance team sent by TLA to fact-find. Or (if the GM wishes), they are freelance opportunists who heard about the shutdown, competitors, grunts hired by the lost item shippers, or simply 'tourists in the wrong place at the wrong time'.

TLA wants this post reopened, so by midnight it is sending in a full strike team and replacement crew. So the characters have until midnight to do what they can to save TLA some money (or make some themselves).

Arrival At Fort Sumter

The Outpost does not respond to any communications hails. The automatic broadcast on the station's main channel simply repeats: "This Lighthouse is temporarily closed. Please try again tomorrow."

There are two visiting cargo vessels harbored at the Outpost, plus 2 of the 4 Outpost excursion boats are moored at the company dock.

Everything else seems normal, save that no people (employees or clients) are outside the building, and the lighthouse on top is covered in filth -- bird droppings or something similar. The rest is ship-shape, and even the lawnmowing robots are still operating.

Experienced eyes will note that the gates and blast doors are closed. Also, the heavy weapons are armed, track any incoming visitor, and seem ready to fire. Oops. This *is* the fort that once survived 22 months of Civil War blockage, they do have a reputation to uphold.

Entrance therefore can be achieved by:

- a. Knowing the emergency entrance passcodes, provided only to TLA employees sent specifically for this mission. Any such codes are valid only for a short time window, currently "5pm-6pm". This means they will have to waste valuable time (and daylight) if they wish to wait;
- b. Surviving at least 4 minutes of railgun fire while parachuting in, boating in, or speed-swimming in. Then, breaking through armored doors or gunproof windows to enter the buildings;
- c. Being enough of a closet history buff to know of some undocumented 'secret entrance', at the GM's discretion;
- d. Cleverly thinking of sneaking in underground, past the guns and up its sewers. This will trip outpost sensors, so they can expect any base security staff to be on alert. It also means a surprise encounter with 3 lurking sharks. Plus, anyone who swims in the harbor will start feeling a little strange (read **Strange Experience One**).

Strange Experience One: Art Attack

"You feel especially well rested, for no particular reason. In fact, you are suddenly overcome with a strong desire to drop what you were doing and . . ."

(roll on table or choose according to character's nature):

1. Compose a song
2. Begin writing that novel you always wanted to write
3. Create bold new culinary dishes
4. Write sensitive, insightful poetry
5. Create tiny, intricate machines of great precision and cleverness
6. (other artistic urge, GM's discretion)

This urge passes after they complete one work, but the desire to do more such work still remains a small part of their thoughts.

Strange Experience Two: Dying For Chocolate

Anyone who drinks, swims or showers at the base will get the "Art Attack" syndrome, and repeated exposure just makes it more severe. Eventually, one drops everything except the basics of survival (food, drink, sleep) in order to monomaniacally pursue one's artistic pursuits. Everything except 'create' is a distraction.

Being away from the base's water supply results in 'detoxifying', and after one day normal thinking returns. There is slight amnesia about the 'creative period' but characters do retain the memories of joy and artistic creation.

(Note that the Art Attack effect just provides dedication and a focus on craftsmanship. Whether the art is *good* is your call!)

Inside!

Depending on how they entered, any room can be their starting point. Oddly, they will not encounter any violent threats, and can simply move through the base to gather information.

Subterranean:

- A. Backup generator, backup water supply, and backup communications. Not currently in use.
- B. Ammo dump, Supplies, and Storage. Nothing of note, all seems ship-shape.

Ground Level:

- C. Command and Communications.

This controls most trade-related station functions, including communications and lock-down in case of emergency or attack. And, surprise surprise, it seems someone has triggered the "Emergency Lock Out" panel. See **Killing The Emergency** for more details.

- D. Security Zone.

This area is **Locked!** (It's also a bit of a red herring; there is no real information or need to enter here.) Consider this the gratuitous combat sequence. If the characters try to enter, you can make this as easy (pick the lock) or difficult (twenty defense drones and laser cannons) as you wish. Other than being able to lock down the base (which has already been done using the civilian controls), there is nothing useful to do here.

- E. Warehouse.

Storage of trade goods, in sealed containers. None show any signs of tampering, opening, or malice.

Second Floor:

- F. Living quarters.

Here's where you can have fun. The Outpost had a staff of 16, plus 7 visiting ship crew. All have undergone STRANGE EXPERIENCE TWO. As a result, only 9 people are at the base. The rest have gone into Charleston itself in pursuit of their own personal vision. (As a result, the Charleston group are 'sobering up' and will return in a day or so). See "THE CREW" for individual details.

Top:

- G. The Lighthouse.

This working lighthouse is a single tiny room with the big rotating light bulb, and a few hundred bats. It is literally stinking with guano, and anyone entering is quickly mobbed by dozens of tiny, frightened bats.

Harbor:

- H. Trade ship one.

This ship is only partially unloaded. There is clear evidence that a loading unit caught fire at some point. Two of the containers are burned and split, spilling their contents. One contains grains and rice; the other contains chocolate -- technically, unprocessed cocoa beans. This mess has been scattered about, as if birds have pecked at it.

I. Trade ship two.

This ship is empty, apparently having unloaded its cargo already. There is no sign of the crew in residence, which is unusual -- usually a skeleton crew is left after an unloading for security reasons.

The Crew

Only 9 individuals remain at the outpost, the rest being in Charleston. All are totally in the thrall of the "Art Attack" condition, manifesting as:

- Outpost Captain and Security Chief: mad poets, both
- Outpost Comm Officer, Med Office, and Machine Operator: erotic sensualists
- Ship #2 crewmember: impressionist painter
- Warehouse operator: watchmaker
- The Cook: deep thinker
- Trade Liaison: dead of unknown causes (GM note: likely just a stroke)

The Log Book

The log book exists in three places. There is an electronic copy in the outpost systems. Both the Captain and the Security Chief have a paper copy, which they are using as scrap paper for writing their poems (on the back). The latest log entries read:

Friday Report: We have been invaded by bats! A roost of them have set up in the Lighthouse. Our Cook hypothesizes they were driven from the mountains due to feeding problems. Who cares! Trade is up.

Saturday Report: I don't know which I hate more -- the damn tourists or the annoying bats. Business as usual, plus I've assigned a cleanup crew for the Lighthouse by COB Sunday.

Sunday Report: A new ship docked, and suffered a minor mishap. We will finish loading it tomorrow. This delays our other clean-up.

Monday Report: Slow day, slow day. I wish this work would go away.

Tuesday Report: The base, on yet off. I hear no call for work. Instead, let the machines rule the work world, and my spirits soar in realms of ethereal bliss!

(no further entries)

Killing The Emergency

One simply turns off the Emergency panel and turns on the communication and door controls, and the station is back in operation. Consider this a simple task for any tech, moderately difficult for others.

Once they deactivate the Emergency Lock Out, an TLA followup crew can move in and re-occupy the base, move the existing personnel to the hospital, and resume trade operations. See **The Real Story** to see why this is an inadequate solution.

The Real Story

The sudden flock of mysterious bats appeared only a few days earlier and immediately roosted in the Lighthouse. Maintenance robots were not well suited to removing them, so the Captain decided to have the crew handle it "when

they got a chance".

However, the bats managed to get into the damaged cargo ship and eat the raw chocolate. This, processed by their unique metabolism, results in bat guano (bat droppings) that have strongly psychotropic and hallucinogenic properties. And these droppings, falling into the harbor water, have contaminated the drinking supply for the base. This resulted in "Dying for Chocolate" for all the crew.

If the cargo is cleaned up or the bats are eliminated, the problem will not repeat. If the backup water supply is turned on, the base is "safe". The remaining guano in the harbor water will, about a day after any cleanup, become diluted enough to be safe. As the contaminant does not show up in tests, it is unlikely to be discovered by any followup teams or medical crews.

End Game

There are three likely endings.

- **Clueless.** "Turn the base back on, wait for replacement crew, go home." This doesn't really solve the problem -- unless the bat dropping issue is tackled, the problem will just repeat.
- **Loyal.** To really solve the problem, the characters need to activate the backup water supply, clean up the loose chocolate, and (optionally) get rid of the bats.
- **Smart.** Why did the crew go wacko? Assuming the characters deduced the contaminant, they have now discovered a new and nigh-undetectable drug that makes people ignore distractions and really focus on their own personal muse.

That raises a question of loyalty. Do you inform TLA of the Art Attack drug? Sell the idea? Bury it? Go into business for yourself? Capture the bats? Hide the evidence?

"A disaster.

To realize the true find.

To best act.

This is the true test of character."

- TLA Aphorism -



Bitter Water, Sweet Magic

by Chad Underkoffler

Introduction

Elat Aqaba, a player in occult circles, contacts the PCs to investigate something supernatural. The fee offered is substantial. Aqaba is known to be **old**, wealthy, honest, and discreet.

For an explanation of the Iron Ref rules and a list of the secret ingredients, please see the [Introduction](#).

Aqaba (see description below) arranges a private meeting with the PCs. In a Stilted, flat voice, he speaks:

"Man known to Aqaba dead. Zhang Li. Taoist alchemist. Beaten, slashed in empty room last week. Aqaba want to discover if either these responsible." (*Aqaba hands the PCs two folders: yellow and blue.*) "When talk to them, codephrase 'bitter water.' Aqaba give half payment now, with expenses." (*Aqaba indicates a box sitting on the table. In addition to the money, there's a cellphone and a debit card for \$8,000, with a sticky note reading "PIN 1836."*) "Call Aqaba daily to update. If need reach Aqaba, voicemail programmed. If discover anything, call Aqaba. Questions?"

Aqaba won't reveal more than he has known the suspects for a long time. (Though things phrased as commands may force him to; see below).

Investigation

The suspects are powerful magi, 100+ years old, and difficult to locate. Their defenses jam supernatural information-gathering. The folders include a picture of the suspect with date on the back, as well as basic background information. (For a less travel-intensive game, the suspects can be located in one large city. For extra intrigue, a PC may have had dealings with a suspect in the past.)

The PCs may investigate the suspects in any order. If the PCs don't report in daily, Aqaba calls for a status report. He won't volunteer information to the PCs unless they unwittingly phrase it as a direct command.

THE YELLOW FOLDER: James O'Grady

Folder Information: Photo dated 1981. Emigrated from Ireland in 1855. Screever (pavement artist working in chalks). Sorcerer and runist of skill. Smoker. Disliked Zhang-- and all Chinese. Last known location: Central Park, New York City.

The best way to find O'Grady is to walk around Central Park, studying the pavement. The PCs will eventually find an

intricate chalked design incorporating runic elements. For those with occult senses, they detect that the artwork draws magic and ghosts. Sitting near the pattern is a nondescript man, fiddling with colored chalks and holding out his hat. He claims to be the artist, James O'Grady; unfortunately, he doesn't match the picture, nor does he respond to the phrase "bitter water." He is O'Grady's apprentice. If followed surreptitiously, he leads the PCs to O'Grady's home. If threatened, he immediately scuffs a chalk pattern near his feet, and defends himself with meager physical and magical abilities.

If summoned, O'Grady appears within ten minutes, demanding an explanation. After hearing the code-phrase, he'll ask, "Is there a message from Aqaba? We're not due to meet for another eight months." When told of Zhang's murder, he'll say "Good." He wistfully denies having anything to do with it. He admits to being part of a group with Zhang, but refuses to elaborate. He likes Varady (though he's unaware of the wizard's secret) and despised Zhang. If questioned about Aqaba, he's dismissive -- as if Aqaba were unimportant. His alibi is that he's been working on an extremely difficult sigil in the basement. He may brag about its intended purpose (left as GM's option; it should be big and involve ghosts -- an ectoplasm containment grid would be appropriate.) He has an address and phone number for Varady's shop in DC, but won't give that to the PCs without inducement.

Go to Shadowbat Attack, below.

THE BLUE FOLDER: Estragon Varady

Folder Information: Photo dated 1971. Born in Philadelphia, PA, in 1823. Wizard of the mind. Bookdealer; dislikes telephones. Dealt respectfully with Zhang. Last known location: Washington, DC.

Estragon Varady deals with real-deal occult books; indeed, he's known for it in the right circles. He has a little bookshop in Georgetown; discovering its location is a mild challenge, because Grimoire Books doesn't advertise. Talking to locals in the occult subculture helps, as will wandering around Georgetown looking for doors that fade in and out of reality, glimmering will o' the wisps, or strange sigils on the sidewalk.

When found, the sign on the door gives the hours of operation as nightly from 6 pm until 3 am. Varady is never seen entering or leaving the place, and it is too small to have an apartment. (He teleports.) Varady's answering service gives the shop's hours and location, and can set up special appointments or take messages.

Varady's shop is remarkably empty -- there are only a dozen scattered books around the single room; indeed, it looks more art gallery than bookstore. Varady is erudite, charming, and friendly. When presented with the codephrase, he smiles and says, "Yes? What does the maitre'd of our little lunching club desire?"

If told, he appears shocked that Zhang is dead -- "I just had dinner with him two months ago!" His alibi is that he was with a customer -- his appointment book (and indeed, the customer) backs this up. He admits to being part of a social club with Zhang and others (all dead). He liked Zhang and is offended by O'Grady's bigotry. He is amused by Aqaba for some reason.

Go to Shadowbat Attack, below.

The Bitter Water Tontine

- Magnas Coloradas (called "Red Sleeves" due to what happened to his clothes in battle) was a striking, 6' 6" giant Apache chief. He united the Apache nation after the murder of Apache men, women, and children for the Mexican bounty on their scalps. Mangas and his 400 warriors avenged the treachery through slaughter. Taken by betrayal, he was interrogated by General JR West and killed under mysterious circumstances on January 17, 1863. An Army surgeon cut off the head, boiled it, and sent the skull to a phrenologist.
- A cabal of 11 magi based in New York got hold of the skull later that year, and summoned the great chief's spirit for interrogation, believing Magnas to have had mystical powers. Under duress, the ghost spoke of a hidden Medicine Jug, filled with magic xocoatl, that he had taken during a Mexican raid. The cabal went West to steal

the Jug. In taking the Jug from its guardians, 6 of the cabal were killed. The 5 remaining members decided to enter a tontine, leaving the administration and care of the Jug with the golem servant of one of their dead comrades.

- A *tontine* is an annuity shared by subscribers to common fund with the benefit of survivorship: the share of each survivor increases as the other subscribers die, until at last the whole goes to the last survivor. The commands of the Bitter Water Tontine to Aqaba were:
 1. Protect the xocoatl;
 2. Protect yourself;
 3. Only we who are here are allowed to drink the xocoatl;
 4. We must all drink on the same day;
 5. Summon us when it is time to drink again;
 6. Guard the sanctity of the tontine: if one of we magi is killed through the acts or agency of another magi, the murderer must be destroyed.
- The tontine has met once per decade since 1836, summoned by Aqaba, to drink and "socialize." These dinner parties were tense affairs, with the members on guard against each other as they grew in strength and years.

Xocoatl ("bitter water")

Mundane chocolate is made from cacao beans and contains *theobromine*, Greek for "food of the gods." The Aztecs prepared a chocolate beverage made from fermented dried beans, vanilla, chilies, herbs, and maize. Used as a ceremonial drink, xocoatl was also touted for its spiritual and aphrodisiacal qualities.

The xocoatl in the Medicine Jug is potent, formulated out of an extinct species of cacao. When drunk, it confers longevity (though not youthfulness or true immortality; the magicians had to make other arrangements) and a mild, permanent increase in supernatural power. In addition, it either enhances a specific ability of the imbiber, or ameliorates one of his deficits; e.g., it has granted Aqaba free will, reduced the disabilities of Varady's condition, and enhanced O'Grady's hand-eye coordination to superhuman levels. Unfortunately, one dose per decade is effectual; additional doses are wasted.

Shadowbats

Matte black, featureless bat-shapes of solid shadow. They lack mouths, but their wings are razor-sharp. Three solid hits and a good stomp causes them to burst into flame. Their master can see through their nonexistent eyes. There should be 9 shadowbats per PC; adjust this number as necessary.

Shadowbat Attack

If the suspect is the first investigation, a sudden flock of mysterious bats -- shadowbats -- appear and attack, having finally wormed in through the suspect's defenses. The shadowbats focus on the suspect.

- If he is secretly the shadowbats' master (see below), he'll survive the attack;
- If he is not, he'll die without PC intervention. If the PCs save his life, he'll reveal all about the tontine.
- If killed, his last words are "tontine" and "xocoatl."

The shadowbats flee upon the death of the suspect or when half of their number are destroyed.

If the suspect is the second investigation and/or informed about the shadowbat attack on the first suspect, he will either tell the PCs:

- Nothing (he is not the master and the other suspect is alive);
- All about the tontine, then demand to speak with Aqaba (if he is not the master and the other suspect is dead); or
- To prepare for death (if he is the master).

Then, the shadowbats boil out of the darkened corners, hungry for blood. The shadowbats' master, if not already present, appears out of nowhere and joins the fray.

NPCs

Elat Aqaba, *Free-willed Golem*: Tall, large, swarthy. Dresses exceedingly well. Sharp-eyed PCs may notice that his tongue is gray, mottled with black. This is his *chem*, the animating tablet inscribed with the Hebrew word for truth, *emet*. His voice is stilted and flat. He has the best protection -- both magical and mundane -- that money can buy. May respond without thinking to requests phrased as direct commands ("Tell me about Varady . . .").

James O'Grady, *Screever Sorcerer*: Tall, wavy white hair with muttonchops, gray eyes. Nimble fingers. He is a master of magic dealing with spirits and emotions, usually but not always focused through chalk runes. Susceptible to flattery.

Estragon Varady, *Wizard and Secret Vampire*: Elegant, stout, with salt and pepper hair, brown eyes. Amazing smile. Gourmand. Incredible with magic of the mind, encompassing what is termed psionic abilities with a decidedly Jungian, archetypal slant. Became a vampire in 1977, keeps it quiet. Repeated doses of the xocoatl have ameliorated many of the disadvantages of his condition.

Who Is The Shadowbats' Master And Why?

- **Aqaba**: Poor phrasing of commands forced him to drink the xocoatl (before midnight on that long ago 1863 night) without binding him to the restriction against murder. Each dose has increased his free will; he believes by consuming the rest of the xocoatl alone, he will become truly alive. He has used the PCs to track down the last two tontine members.
- **O'Grady**: He's a power-hungry bastard hell-bent on using the xocoatl and his giant chalk sigils to crack open the doorway between life and death. Why? Godlike power. He never liked Zhang, and Varady was in the way.
- **Varady**: Zhang discovered his condition and was going to tell Aqaba, claiming that Varady's undead state eliminated him from the tontine-- after all, one must die to become a vampire. Varady believes the entire potion will cure his vampirism.

Aftermath

The events of this scenario end the tontine. This could leave the Medicine Jug up for grabs.

For GMs worried about the effects of the xocoatl in PC hands, keep in mind that the effects can be mild -- the magi needed a dozen doses to get to their power level, only one dose per decade is effective; and once word gets out about the xocoatl, everyone will be gunning for it.

Beyond Sylvan War Lore

Six New GURPS Martial Arts Styles for Elves

By Neal Byles

GURPS Martial Arts introduced roleplayers to the idea that Elves would likely develop their own martial arts styles. With their reputations for mastery of the sword and bow, Code of Honor to live elegantly in all things, and effectively limitless amount of time for training and leisure, Elves could not be more ideally suited to do just that. To the elegant, ageless Elves, combat is far more than just battle. It is art.

Sylvan War Lore was originally developed with this aesthetic in mind. It proved to be so effective that it was eventually taught to other Sylvan races -- Fauns, Leprechauns and the like, in order to help defend against human and Orc depredations. However, while Sylvan War Lore is the most common Elven martial art, it is not the only one, nor was it the first. For millennia Elves have kept their most powerful and elegant fighting styles secret even from other Sylvans.

In addition to the standard Skills and Maneuvers associated with each Elven style, certain spells are frequently used by certain styles. The prerequisites for spells common to a style are assumed and not mentioned individually.

Note also that non-Elves, even Sylvans, are never taught any of these styles. Even Half-Elves only rarely earn the right to study them, and then only as a reward for great deeds or if particularly high potential is detected, which can be represented by a fairly costly Unusual Background (20 points). If any non-Elves were to demonstrate knowledge of any of these styles, at best they would be hunted down, captured and magically "deprogrammed;" at worst they would become the targets of the Cloud Shadows.

These are but six of the Elven styles developed by the Fae-folk over the centuries. From the swashbuckling Blade Dancers to the stealthy Cloud Shadows, from the serene and deadly Bow Singers to the pacifistic masters of the Way of the Tree, from the primal Wolf Runners to the chivalric Eternal Defenders, the true Elven Masters are feared by all of Nature's enemies. In most cases the Combat Art is every bit as important to the Elven martial artist as the Combat Skill, as required by their racial Code of Honor. The cinematic advantage Trained by a Master is available for all of these styles, GM permitting. Cross training in more than one style is not common but does occur among the older masters, where the styles are compatible.

BLADE DANCING

14/22 POINTS

The Blade Dancers are the most flamboyant of the Elven martial artists. Traditionally, Blade Dancers are flighty even by Elven standards -- Dwarves typically can't stand them -- taking very little save their fencing seriously at all. Blade Dancers are often given to outrageous acts of daredevilry and are usually quite noticeable by their elegant dress. Armor is worn lightly, if at all. Elven Silversilk is the coveted protection of all Blade Dancers.

Fencing is the heart of Blade Dancing. The skill is learned with a primary focus on the Elven longsword but the Elven smallsword is also taught (see New Weapons, below). The most common practice of Blade Dancing is a two-handed style with longsword in the dominant hand and smallsword in the off-hand; the latter is usually used defensively. However, some individuals prefer saving the off-hand for a cloak, buckler, the Elven equivalent of the Main-Gauche or nothing at all. If available, the Weapon Master (Fencing) advantage is open to Blade Dancers.

As the name implies, dancing is also an integral part of the Blade Dancer's training. A fight just isn't a fight without some sense of choreography to it, even if the opponent is less than cooperative. For this reason anyone with Style Familiarity: Blade Dancing who is faced with such an artist gets an additional +1 to defend against their attacks.

Unfortunately the only beings likely to be familiar with Blade Dancing are other Blade Dancers. On the rare occasions that two Blade Dancers meet in mortal combat -- an Elf against a Dark Elf, for instance -- the fight can easily reach epic lengths, as both parties will tend to get lost in the beauty of the dance. Not surprisingly, many Blade Dancers are also Bards and musicians. Luck, Daredevil and Ambidexterity are common advantages.

Movement spells, especially Wallwalking and Blink, are favorites among Blade Dancers, as are spells that will enhance their grace, such as Dexterity, Balance and Ambidexterity. Legends abound of Dancing Masters who use advanced Sound spells and even Illusions to provide their own soundtracks and lightshows.

Primary Skills: Acrobatics; Dancing; Fencing; Fencing Art; Savoir Faire

Secondary Skills: Fast Draw (Sword); Fast Talk; Jumping; Tactics

Optional Skills: Brawling; Buckler; Cloak; Main-Gauche; Musical Instrument; Poetry; Singing; Stealth

Maneuvers: Close Combat (Fencing); Corps-a-Corps; Feint (Fencing); Fleche; Hit Location (Fencing); Lunge; Off-Hand Fighting (Fencing or Main-Gauche); Riposte; Stop Hit

Cinematic Skills: Light Walk

Cinematic Maneuvers: Dual-Weapon Attack (Fencing); Enhanced Parry (Fencing)

CLOUD SHADOWS

12/23 POINTS

The Cloud Shadows are the spies, scouts, and sometimes assassins of the Elves. It is a rare style favored by the Dark Elves although not exclusively so. An Elf would have to have a very good reason to employ the deadlier skills of this Art, however. These reasons are usually tied to the protection of important Elven secrets or to their racial Sense of Duty to Nature.

Cloud Shadows are deadly combatants when they are seen, but some would argue that their mission has failed when open combat occurs. Through the use of Stealth, Invisibility Art, the Invisibility spell, and the clever employment of Sound and Illusion spells, there are few living creatures capable of avoiding detection as well as the masters of this style.

While Cloud Shadows are quite adept at unarmed combat, theirs is primarily a weapon art. The most common choices of primary weapons are the short sword or knife and the short bow, with fencing weapons and throwing knives following closely behind. The Weapon Master Advantage, both the general and specific forms, is common to the masters of this art.

Sound, Light/Darkness, and Body Control spells are a must for Cloud Shadows. Illusion, Air, Communication/Empathy, and Mind Control spells are also common. Assassin Cloud Shadows almost always learn the Deathtouch spell as well, which is deadly when used in conjunction with the Hand of Death skill.

Primary Skills: Brawling; Camouflage; Climbing; Jumping; Stealth; Wrestling; any two Weapon Skills

Secondary Skills: Acrobatics; Survival (Woodland); Swimming; other Weapon Skills

Optional Skills: Breath Control; Escape; Hypnotism

Maneuvers: Feint (Weapon or Brawling); Ground Fighting; Hit Location (Weapon or Brawling); Riposte

Cinematic Skills: Blind Fighting; Breaking Blow; Hand of Death; Invisibility Art; Light Walk; Mental Strength; Power Blow; Pressure Points; Pressure Secrets

Cinematic Maneuvers: Binding; Roll with the Blow

BOW SINGING

6/26 POINTS

Next to Sylvan War Lore, this is the most common style for Elves to learn and is largely responsible for the Elves' reputation as experts with the bow. The masters of this art are truly fearsome with the Elven longbow -- in fact, it was the Bow Singing Masters who first developed the secret to creating this fantastic weapon (see "Medieval and Fantasy Missile Weapons" by Dan Howard for details on the Elven longbow). The Weapon Master (Bow) Advantage is

essential to this style in campaigns in which it is allowed.

While singing isn't as integral to the Bow Singer style as dancing is to the Blade Dancers, it is still a common skill. Many Bow Singers use song to focus their concentration on their art. The sound of the Elves' ethereal voices singing gentle, melodious tunes, along with the harmony of an arrow in flight have been the last sound ever heard by many an unfortunate Orc. These artists often perform Singing and Meditation as one single action.

Bow Singers sometimes study their weapon to the exclusion of all others, taking a Major Vow to use no other weapon, but this is not required. Some of the style's practitioners have learned to use their bows to parry missile weapons, although this can only be accomplished when there is no arrow nocked in their own bows. They are also capable of using their bows to parry melee weapons but few Bow Singers will risk damaging their beloved weapons this way. Rather they have perfected the art of avoiding attacks altogether. The masters of the style have also learned the legendary trick of nocking and firing two arrows at once; this is reflected in the Dual-Weapon Attack cinematic maneuver and takes an extra round to ready. Fast drawing two arrows at a time is at -2.

Bow Singers almost always learn the Dexterity and the Hawk Vision spells. Singers with a mind toward defense often learn Shield and Missile Shield as well. Elemental spells are also commonly studied toward the end of learning Fiery Missiles, Lightning Missiles and/or Icy Missiles to use on their arrows and Shape Stone/Metal to make arrowheads. All Bow Singers are required to learn Shape Plant to make their own bows and arrows. This spell is absolutely necessary, along with master-level skill in Armoury (Bowyer/Fletcher), in order to fashion an Elven longbow.

Primary Skills: Armoury (Bowyer/Fletcher); Bow; Fast Draw (Arrow); Meditation; Stealth

Secondary Skills: Brawling; Camouflage; Parry Missile Weapons (Bow); Survival (Woodland); Tactics (Ranged Combat)

Optional Skills: Musical Instrument (usually stringed); Singing; other Weapon Skills

Maneuvers: Hit Location (Bow)

Cinematic Skills: Blind Fighting (Bow only); Pressure Points (Bow only); Pressure Secrets (Bow only); Zen Archery

Cinematic Maneuvers: Dual-Weapon Attack (Arrow); Enhanced Dodge

THE WAY OF THE TREE

7/37 POINTS

The disciples of the Way of the Tree are perhaps the most rare Elven martial artists of all. Only true adherents to the style's ultra-pacifistic philosophy are ever taught this style. However, the masters of this art are nearly impossible to defeat when forced to defend themselves or Nature.

Disciples of the Way of the Tree must learn their Philosophy at IQ level or higher. As the name implies, this philosophy holds the tree as the ultimate example of how to live, especially as life pertains to violence. The tree lives its life aiding the life cycle and, most importantly, doing no harm. It is steadfast and resilient and always protects all that it shelters. Followers of the Way must take the Disadvantages Major Vow: Use No Weapons, Pacifism: Self-Defense Only and Pacifism: Cannot Kill, as well as the Code of Honor: Protect All Innocents (-5). The pacifism practiced by the Way is very nearly Total Non-Violence. Its practitioners will defend themselves and other innocents and most assuredly the Nature they are sworn to protect, but neither will they kill nor cause any lasting (i.e. crippling) harm to their enemies. Plant Empathy is almost universal among disciples and Animal Empathy is common, but neither is required.

The Way of the Tree is one of the few Elven styles that does not teach the relevant Art skill (in this case Judo Art) as part of its requirement. This is because the philosophy of the Way considers it unseemly to make art out of any act of violence, no matter how non-lethal.

All followers of the Way of the Tree learn extensively from the Plant College of magic and often the Animal College as well. Body Control, Mind Control, and Healing magic are also common, both to aid in non-damaging combat and to repair any damage they may inadvertently cause. Air, Water, and Earth spells are standard areas of study but disciples of the Way are loath to learn any Fire spells, with the exception of Extinguish Fire. While such Elves will learn Ignite

Fire as the necessary prerequisite, they will not cast the spell once it is learned. Most disciples rely on Water spells for the same purpose. Exceptionally noble disciples have attempted to learn Resist Fire and Flameturning to help protect their forests but few are able to stomach learning all of the necessary prerequisites.

Primary Skills: Judo; Philosophy; Meditation; Naturalist

Secondary Skills: Botany; Camouflage; Climbing; Stealth;

Optional Skills: Any Medical or other natural Science skills; Musical Instrument; Singing

Maneuvers: Arm/Wrist Lock; Breakfall; Disarming

Cinematic Skills: Blinding Touch; Mental Strength; Pressure Points; Pressure Secrets; Push; Yin-Yang Healing (or its equivalent)

Cinematic Maneuvers: Enhanced Dodge; Enhanced Parry (Judo); Hand Clap Parry; Roll with the Blow; Sticking

THE FOREST RUNNERS

17/23 POINTS

Sometimes called the Wolf Runners or the Fae Beasts, the Forest Runners have used an intimate knowledge and understanding of animals to develop one of the deadliest styles of all the Elven martial arts. All of its practitioners either have or develop the Animal Empathy advantage, and many have the Beastkin Advantage as well. The Minor Vow of Vegetarianism is common but not required (except of the Beastkin).

Other Elves often look upon Forest Runners with a mixture of confusion, envy, and pity. These Elves seek elegance in the perfect communion with nature, particularly the animals, an interpretation that is not often shared by their kin. Their Sense of Duty to Nature is taken extremely seriously, even by Elven standards, and they can sometimes become quite feral in their pursuit of natural synergy. The Forest Runners tend to be minimalists when it comes to clothing and fashion and will never wear any armor beyond furs or light leather, and only rarely those. Moreover it is uncommon for Forest Runners to use weapons at all and even then they usually restrict themselves to stone axes, knives or spears (Major or Minor Vow, respectively). The Weapon Master Advantage is obviously inappropriate for this style. The disadvantages Primitive and Technophobia are common, as is Claustrophobia.

Obviously Animal magic is integral to the Forest Runner style with Shapeshifting spells considered to be the height of mastery. A common practice among Runners is to use the Partial Shapeshifting spell (p. G11) to assume predatory teeth and claws while engaged in combat. True lycanthropy is typically viewed as a blessing of the Eternal among the more fanatic Forest Runners. As all of the Runners' skills and maneuvers were derived from studying and emulating various animals, most of them may be utilized even in full animal shapes, at the discretion of the GM. Healing, Sound, Plant and Elemental (Air and Water) spells are also common.

Primary Skills: Jumping; Karate; Karate Art; Running; Stealth; Survival (Woodland)

Secondary Skills: Acrobatics; Camouflage; Climbing; Tracking

Optional Skills: Animal Handling; Musical Instrument (usually percussive); Singing; Veterinary

Maneuvers: Cat Stance; Feint (Karate); Ground Fighting (Karate); Hit Location (Karate); Jab; Jump Kick; Kicking; Riposte (Karate); Spin Kick; Sweeping Kick; Neck Snap

Cinematic Skills: Blind Fighting; Light Walk; Power Blow; Flying Leap

Cinematic Maneuvers: Acrobatic Kick; Springing Attack

ETERNAL DEFENDERS

11/25 POINTS

The Defenders of the Eternal is the closest thing to a religious and chivalric order that the Elves have produced. They are the self-proclaimed protectors of Life, Nature, the Eternal (see p. F36-37) and everything Sylvan. Dark Elves often name themselves Defenders and pursue mastery of this art, creating a marked schism in interpretation of the philosophy of the style.

The Defender style centers on the Fae Knife (see New Weapons, below), a light, pointed, hand-and-a-half sword similar to the Katana but with a straight, two-edged blade. The Fae Knife uses the Katana skill and like the Katana it

may be used interchangeably one- or two-handedly (at +1 to damage for two-handed use) with Parry at 1/2 skill when used one-handed and 2/3 skill when used two-handed. The Weapon Master (Katana) advantage is available to Defenders where appropriate.

The Defenders follow a Code of Honor, the tenets of which are: own no more than you can carry; never refuse a worthy request for help; defend Nature at all costs; always protect the innocent and those weaker than yourself; and never put personal feelings or honor over the welfare of others. Obviously, the Dark Elf version of this Code is selective in its interpretation, only including Sylvans in the "innocent/weaker" and request for aid categories. This Code is worth -15 points (-10 for Dark Elves). Fanaticism and Megalomania are not uncommon disadvantages for Defenders, as is Pacifism: Cannot Harm Innocents.

The standard practice of the style is to fight with the Fae Knife alone, although dual-weapon variations do exist. While the shield is not a native tool for Elves, it has been adopted by many of the Fae-folk for its defensive capabilities and is sometimes used by Eternal Defenders. Defenders may or may not wear armor as a matter of personal preference. Light mail (see "Ancient and Fantasy Armor Revisited" by Dave Steele for stats on light mail), usually enhanced with Fortify, Deflect and Lighten spells, is popular and Silversilk (similarly enchanted) is sometimes bestowed upon the Masters of highest status and reputation. The bow is one of the few weapons that Defenders will learn in addition to the Fae Knife but they only use them when necessary.

Eternal Defenders often recognize that the best way to defend the Sylvan lands, especially from human encroachment, is through diplomacy not warfare. As such many Defenders are trained diplomats and bards and some even study human politics. Defenders are often charismatic and generally have excellent reputations among Sylvans.

Typical spell choices for Defenders are Protection, Body Control, Mind Control, Communication/Empathy, Healing and Movement spells. The various Nature Colleges (Animal, Plant and Elemental) are also common, as are most battle magic spells.

Primary Skills: Breath Control; Katana (Fae Knife); Katana Art (Fae Knife); Meditation; Philosophy; Savoir Faire

Secondary Skills: Acrobatics; Body Language; Diplomacy; Parry Missile Weapons; Tactics

Optional Skills: Bard; Bow; Brawling; Politics; Shield; Stealth; Wrestling

Maneuvers: Feint (Katana); Hit Location (Katana); Lunge; Riposte; Stop Hit

Cinematic Skills: Blind Fighting; Body Control; Flying Leap; Immovable Stance; Light Walk; Mental Strength; Power Blow (Katana only)

Cinematic Maneuvers: Enhanced Parry (Katana); Whirlwind Attack

New Weapons

There are several weapons that are unique to Elves and especially Elven martial artists. Note that stats for the Elven longbow are reprinted for convenience from the article "Medieval and Fantasy Missile Weapons" by Dan Howard, which should be consulted for a complete description. Note also that Elves never make these weapons at less than Fine quality; these stats reflect this. Elven longbows can't be made by non-Elves, and average or cheap knock-offs of Elven blades should reduce all damages by 1. Very fine quality Elven blades should add 1 to the values below (see B74 for more about weapon quality). Prices are estimated for beginning Wealth purposes only as Elves never sell these weapons.

Hand Weapons

Weapon	Type	Damage	Reach	Cost	Weight	Min ST	Special Notes
FENCING (DX-5)							
Elven smallsword	imp cut	thr +2 sw	C, 1 1	\$2000	1 lb.	—	Max 1d+2
Elven longsword	imp cut	thr +2 sw +1	1, 2 1	\$3000	1 1/2 lb.	7	Max 2d-1

KATANA (DX-5 or Broadsword -2)

Fae Knife	cut	sw+2/+3	1	1,2	\$5000	4 lbs.	10
	imp	thr +3	1				

Ranged Weapons

Weapon **Malf** **Type** **Dam** **SS** **Acc** **1/2Dam** **Max** **Wt** **Cost** **RoF** **Shots** **ST** **Spec.**

BOW

Elven longbow	crit.	imp	thr+4	14	4	STx25	STx30	3	\$40K =	1	10	Max 1d+4
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Play by Mail Roleplaying: Beating the Clock

by Geoff Page

"Next, ask yourself, do you really want to run a PBeM? Spend long thankless nights sifting through moves and answering questions, and roll dice all alone in your cold dark room.¹"

Most, if not all, of the roleplaying games available today haven't been designed with the intention of being played through mail. (By "mail" we are including all types of message based roleplaying including post, e-mail, and messages submitted on web sites.) However, an ever increasing number of people are doing just that. Forcing so-called face-to-face roleplaying games to the play by mail (PBM) format often leads to games that flounder -- there are distinct differences between the two styles of play. These distinctions have already lead to some novel ideas and sage advice for gamemastering online, as noted in References, below. By elaborating on the two largest problems facing PBM games, namely the pacing of game time and the lack of chronology in game posts, hopefully this article will prepare the budding gamemaster for the endeavor of bringing his or her own game online.

Contrasting the PBM Format

At first, it may seem that bringing a face-to-face roleplaying game to the PBM format would require little modification of how the game is played. Simply conduct play normally, except write what you would usually say. In fact this is typically how things are done; one needs only look at the high attrition rate of most PBM games (many of which only last a few turns) to realize that this isn't the best way to go about it.

There are two reasons why this naive approach doesn't work. First there is a much longer time delay between communicate. Around the kitchen table it's easy to rattle off a barrage of questions to the gamemaster and other players, which if you were to individually pose in a series of e-mails (that can only reasonably be responded to every couple days) could literally take weeks. Second there is the added complication that the players receive and respond to messages haphazardly. A player may have wanted to interject to a post that was just received, only to realize that other posts have already made the issue moot.

In dealing with the first problem, the time delay between moves, most people have taken to shunning situations that require rapid player input, in particular combat. This explains the high percentage of story-telling and so-called free-form PBM games. This has the unacceptable ramification of eliminating some of the most enjoyable aspects of roleplaying! Attempts to remedy the problem, such as compacting many moves together, often lead to the players feeling left out of the decision making process for their characters.

As to the second point, the lack of chronology in game posts, little has been said in the past although Matt Rollefson has done a good job of stating the problem in his article.

"Unfortunately, some players will typically receive messages later than others. These players may well feel left out of the game, as they see messages they wish to reply to fly by, followed immediately by responses by other players.²"

Most games operate under the premise that moves occur in the order they are posted (it takes too much time to backtrack). This is a problem in two respects. It not only eliminates input from certain players (Matt's point), but is also unrealistic. A character shouldn't sit idle simply because the player wasn't able to post fast enough!

Dealing with Time

Since there are two aspects to the time problem, keeping the whole game moving along at a reasonable pace and dealing with the progression of time during individual turns, it's advantageous to address each separately. The general idea is that it will be necessary to plan ahead and structure the turn process if you want to keep your game from

floundering.

Planning your Scenario

Without fail, most people bite off more than they can chew. How long do you want your game to run? How much game time does your scenario require? Divide these numbers for most games, and you'll often get an unreasonable result for the PBM format. Each turn can only encompass so much game time. Extravagant campaign ideas should be divided into tractable scenarios that can be completed in three to six month blocks of real time. Demanding more is demanding too much from your players and yourself. Here's an algorithm to determine the pacing of your scenario.

1. Divide your scenario concept into a series of scenes, and write down how much game time each scene should encompass.
2. Determine the amount of real time you would like to spend on the scenario.
3. Give each scene a numeric value to designate its relative importance. For instance, give the first scene a rating of 1, if the next scene is twice as important give it a 2 or if it's less important give it 0.5 or 0.75.
4. Add up the weights just determined and divide by the number of days you want to spend in real time. This number is the number of days (in real time) you should spend on the scene.
5. Check to make sure the number is reasonable. Can you really get through each scene comfortably by sending mail back and forth?

Example

For a concrete example consider the following scenario which is to take place in 4 scenes, encompass 5 days of game time, and be played out in 3 months (see table below). Adding up the weights given to each of the four scenes gives 8.5. Since the scenario is to be completed in three months of real time, or 90 days, this reveals that 1 game day should be resolved every 11 days.

To determine if this value is reasonable, consider each scene individually. The first scene, in which the players are ambushed, needs to be resolved in about 11 days of real time. This would only allow the interchange of a few precious e-mails between the players and gamemasters. The next scene, in which the players will most likely contact the local authorities and eventually accept the challenge of rescuing the kidnapped child, is budgeted for only 5 days -- probably only 1 message could be relayed during this time from each player. Although these values are feasible, it would certainly lead to a sparse game permitting only brief interaction. A more comfortable pace would be to play out this scenario in six months, as opposed to three, which illustrates the essential point of message based roleplaying: Be aware of how much time it will take and plan accordingly!

Scene	Game Time	Weight	Description
0	1-2 weeks	0.0	The players meet along a road to a major city. How they meet isn't played out in the game, they begin the game together.
1	5-30 minutes	1.0	The characters are ambushed by a group of bandits, and a child, traveling in the group the party has joined, is kidnapped.
2	2 hours	0.5	The characters contact the local authorities with the parents of the child to report the crime, but are given the run around. The parents hire the characters to find their child.
3	3-5 days	2.0	The players explore whatever options they can muster (no need to determine them here) and eventually discover the location of the kidnappers hideout and formulate a plan.
4	1 day	5.0	The characters execute their plan and (hopefully) rescue the child, bringing the scenario to a climatic ending.

This generic fantasy scenario is broken up into five scenes, only the latter four of which are actually played out.

Structuring the Turn

After taking steps to ensure that your game is feasible, in that it won't take an enumerable amount of time to complete, it's necessary to deal with the turns themselves. Imagine the following situation, common to most PBM games today.

The turn begins by sending out a prompt and allotting a certain amount of time to complete it. The players, who are unable to coordinate their moves, begin to specify actions for their characters. Often these actions will be contradictory given the actions of other players. There is also the problem of players receiving posts at different times, simply because everybody isn't reading their e-mail in unison, which is compounded by certain players (even you, at times) being away from the game for extended periods.

All and all, this leads to a very chaotic turn . . . not at all what you need if you're trying to move the game along. The solution is to organize the actions of the characters as soon as possible. Right after the prompt for the turn is received, the players should send in a summary of what they want to do for the duration of the turn. With judicious creative liberty, the gamemaster then edits the proposed turns and sends back a summary of what the character will be doing, trying to keep intact the spirit of the turn as much as possible.

You might object that editing a player's turn will hamper his or her enjoyment of the game. By adhering to the spirit of what the player wanted to accomplish most of this criticism is avoided. More important, however, is that this leads to a much more realistic game. First, each character will provide equal input toward the development of the plot. Second, in a realistic situation characters shouldn't be able to do whatever they want. Possible actions are constrained by everything else that's going on in the turn -- naturally!

Given the desire to screen moves before they become official, here is the structure of a typical turn lasting two weeks.

- **Day 1.** The prompt for the turn is sent out stating how much game time will be resolved in the following two weeks.
- **Day 3.** The players respond with very brief turn proposals, stating what they want to accomplish and as many contingency plans as possible.
- **Day 5.** The gamemaster sends out the "official" turn outline, stating what will be accomplished, by who, and when during the turn. In essence the gamemaster will orchestrate the proposed moves of the players together, eliminating inconsistencies.
- **Days 6-14.** The details of the turn are elaborated upon.

Note, in particular, that all the conclusions of the turn are determined very early (in the example, by day 5). If there was a combat taking place, this would mean that the players would know the gross outcome early in the turn. (This is needed, since the entire turn is being done at once; actions early in the turn need to have known conclusions so the rest of the turn can proceed.) What isn't known however, is the specific details on how a particular conclusion is reached. These details, such as what damage is taken, would be worked out after the turn summary is completed (days 6-14 above). As usual, the devil is in the details. Most of the work remains to be done in this last step.

Conclusion

Making the transition from face-to-face to message based play is feasible, regardless of the game system, as long as attention is paid to time. Time is a problem in two respects. First, you need to make sure that your scenario can be completed in a reasonable amount of time, which mainly requires a clear idea of what you want to do and a realistic schedule. Second, is the lack of chronology within the turn itself. The solution here is to orchestrate the move early, so that all the players begin with a clear idea of what they are trying to accomplish.

Understanding why so many games have failed in the past is important for the future of PBM roleplaying. It is hoped

that the advice presented here will give you the resources to bring your game to a fruitful completion. With the popularity of e-mail, and a growing number of people too busy to meet for face-to-face gaming, PBM professes to be an increasingly popular method to roleplay. You too are encouraged to try your hand at this uniquely rewarding method of play.

References

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Pyramid Review

Galaxy Guide (for Heroes Unlimited)

Published by [Palladium Books](#)

Written by **Wayne Breuax Jr.**

224 b&w pages; \$20.95

Aliens Unlimited introduced scores of alien races and numerous plots to augment *Heroes Unlimited*. The *Galaxy Guide* follows the same pattern, but expands on the organizations first mentioned in *Aliens Unlimited*, while leaving plenty of room for future expansion.

There are all too brief details on the Atorians, FAR (Federation of Allied Races), TMC (Thissera-Micean Cooperative), and the TGE (Tagoniglomerate). The Atorians, a matriarchal society, have a vast history and almost limitless power at their disposal. The other groups are collections of races with various agendas and styles that enable the GM to run anything from a political campaign, to a mercenary style setting. More details would have been nice though. For example, while the FAR, TGE, and TMC have their own sections with armor and arms, each illustrated, the Atorians do not. Still, this does mean that future books like *The Guide to Imperial Space* and the *Andromeda Galaxy Sourcebook* will have their work cut out for them.

The book covers several planets in the Milky Way Galaxy. The planet listings are alphabetical and include the destroyed Assin, the former home of the Lassinike mineral aliens; and Toogarth, the home for the booming -- and conquering -- Toogarth empire. If the planet houses a new alien species not covered in *Aliens Unlimited*, then that race is given game stats, and an illustration alongside it.

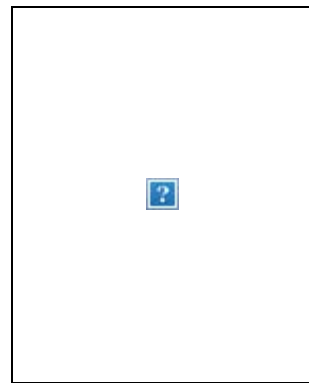
Besides planets, there are more monsters to throw at players. The *Predator*-like Riathenor, first introduced in *Aliens Unlimited*, receives a complete make over with more background information, and different breeds of Riathenors. The standard creature is roughly human-sized, depending on its host, but the Heretshi are quadrupeds, powerfully built with a dangerous animal intelligence. The Dagotte Leader Riathenor is a commander of the monsters, whose status is not in title only. These Dagotte's possess much greater powers. Another branch of Riathenor is the Kilm'aktro, the Giant Riathenor. These monsters have giant hosts instead of humanoid sized ones and this grants them increased strength and size with a loss of speed and intelligence.

Other monsters include the Asterpoids, massive creatures with a stone-like exterior, and Void Whales, creatures who were once thought of as only legend but have been spotted recently.

In addition to races, planets, and monsters, there is a massive section of new equipment. There are new rules for bionics, robotics, and genetic engineering. There are new rail guns, missiles, and a section for miscellaneous equipment.

What type of *Galaxy Guide* would be complete without rules for space travel? For those GMs of *Heroes Unlimited* who want rules for different types of travel, ranging from Slower Than Light to Point to Point Travel, and everything in between, there are rules and general ideas on how to incorporate this material into your own campaign. Those not satisfied with those rules can create their own ships with the sections on Spacecraft Construction that cover funding, basic designs, propulsion, weapons, armor, and extra equipment. Each section includes costs and the different stages available. For example, under armor, there is light, medium, heavy, and battleship. There are several examples for each type of ship.

My favorite part of the book though is Alien Education, Skills & Knowledge. Unlike other Palladium Games where



characters have classes which dictate their skills, *Heroes Unlimited* starts characters off with skill packages that represent what they did prior to becoming a super-hero. These alien skills are much more geared towards a heroic scale with cyberjacker, bounty hunter, information broker, mercenary, combat athlete, mechanic, pilot, fighter pilot, pirate, infantry, scientists, special operative, officer, weapons technician, xeno-biologists, and xeno-robotics. Each section has a listing of skills and bonuses, as well as a brief description of what the skill package represents. There are several new skills, and expanded notes on old skills like medicine and healing, where the level of technology is more improved than on the default earth setting.

There are new rules for cyberjacking, or linking a living mind to a computer. It's a lengthy section but still can't cover it all, hence the reference to the *Rifter #2* where the concept first originated.

The rules for Space Survival include zero atmosphere, vacuum, suffocation, depressurization, zero gravity, and advanced space combat.

The book ends with some new super abilities and some new spells. The new abilities are at home in a stellar campaign with space flight, space native, which enables the character to survive the void of space, alter physical structure void, which turns the character into a living human space field among others. The spells are also space-based, like area gravity field, which generates Earth strength gravity in a thirty foot radius, or protection form radiation, which shields the caster and up to two others from the harmful effect of radiation.

My only problem with this book is it's stuck in the middle of the Palladium rules. There are two settings for the Palladium rules, the ultra-powerful tech M.D.C. (mega damage capacity), and the modern day S.D.C. (structural damage capacity). Many of the conversion notes are minimal, and there are some problems that can result if some of the races use the much higher M.D.C. from *Rifts, Phase World*, and others are stuck with the S.D.C. of standard *Heroes Unlimited*. Those using *Rifts* will have to use *Skrapers* or *Heroes Unlimited 2nd Edition* to do more complete conversions. In some aspects, the *Galaxy Guide* and the setting it hints at may be better just chucking the *Heroes Unlimited* rules and going with the more grandiose M.D.C. Unfortunately there are ties to numerous *Heroes Unlimited* books, including *Villains Unlimited*, which would prevent an easy integrate of the M.D.C. rules.

The book boasts some great art. The cover by Wayne Breaux Jr. is one of the best pieces he's done, and his interior artwork, always more fitting for the high tech settings, really shines here with several individual illustrations of the various Riathenors and numerous vehicles. Kent Burles continues to amaze me with his ability to hop from fantasy to science fiction in the blink of an eye. His illustrations give the book a great sense of scale. Most of his illustrations are the example ships and they give the *Galaxy Guide* a grand scope with vast vistas in the background of the travelling alien ships.

The book will greatly expand the rules for a space-based campaign. The setting, first introduced in *Aliens Unlimited*, is a bit more flushed out, but will still require some work by the GM. Those not playing using the Palladium system may want to hold off buying the book because despite numerous aliens, planets, and monsters, there are a lot of new rules added to the *Heroes Unlimited* system. For 224 pages, the \$20.95 is money well spent.

* * *

Reviewer's Note: To get the most out of this book, the following Palladium books are recommended:

- *Rifter #2:* Cyberjacking rules.
- *Rifter #14:* Atorian Empire expansion with more races and information.
- *Villains Unlimited:* Toograth
- *Aliens Unlimited:* Much of the expanded information in *Galaxy Guide* is originally mentioned here.

--Joe G. Kushner

Pyramid Review

Midnight's Terror (for Kingdoms of Kalamar)

Published by [Kenzer And Company](#)

Written by David Johansson, Steve Johansson, Brian Jelke, Jolly R. Blackburn, David S. Kenzer, David Berent

Illustrated by William O'Connor & Allan Ditzig; Mark Mueller, Rebecca Tudor, Steve Johansson & Bob Burke

\$15.99

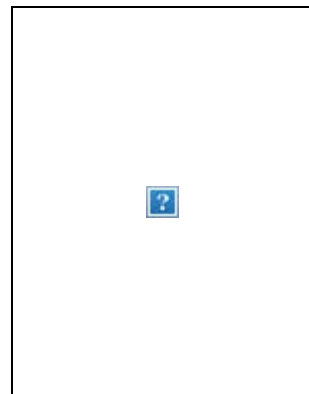
The third scenario to be set in the official *Dungeons & Dragons* 3rd Edition campaign world of the *Kingdoms of Kalamar* is *Midnight's Terror*. This is not part of the trilogy for beginning characters involving the *Coin of Power*, but is instead designed for a party of four to eight characters of either sixth to eighth level (as suggested upon the back cover) or eighth to tenth level (as given in the introduction inside). Prospective DMs thus need to check the challenge rating of the NPCs and encounters within this adventure, though given that these do go as high as CR 14, I would suggest that the book's introduction is correct. It is important to note that *Midnight's Terror* is also a reprint of a previous adventure from Kenzer And Co., *The Secret Temple of Adajy*, which was originally published in 1997. *Midnight's Terror* is the official *3rd Edition* translation of that adventure.

The book is nicely laid out, with the occasional information box placed in the sidebar. As with other adventures for the *Kingdoms of Kalamar*, this scenario is not illustrated within the text of the adventure. Instead it uses Kenzer and Company's ImageQUEST Adventure Illustrator. This has small thumbnail pictures placed in the sidebars and keyed to particular points in the adventure. Each refers to the thumbnail's full sized version to be found at the back of the book and is intended to be shown to the players at the appropriate time. Allan Ditzig draws each of the twenty-five illustrations, which lack the cartoon feel seen in other *Kingdoms of Kalamar* scenarios. Instead they have a dusty, gritty feel to them that befits the adventure's desert setting. The cartography again suffers from being slightly too cramped in places and perhaps the use of lighter shades might have made the maps easier to read.

The adventure begins in the City-State of Thygasha on the Eastern side of Reanaaria Bay, at the Northern end of the Arajyd Hills and on the edge of the Khydoban Desert. The city is an important religious centre for a number of different faiths, some of which oppose each other. It is also the commercial origin of 'Silver Sand.' Found naturally in the Khydoban Desert, Silver Sand is actually a heavier grain of normal sand that has powerful hallucinogenic properties. Both Church of the Silver Mist (church of the god of restful nights, dreams, and aspirations) and The Temple of Sleepless Nights (church of the god of fear and nightmares) value Silver Sand for its ability to impart dreams. Both religions are an important presence within the city, and for this reason as well as the availability of the Silver Sand, Thygasha is known as the City of Dreams. Indeed, one of *Midnight Terror's* several appendices is given over to suggested dreams and nightmares that the player characters could have whilst in or near the city.

Recently rumors have surfaced that a second source of Silver Sand has been located deep in the desert. This is of great interest to numerous forces, but primarily the Plaza Five, a group of merchants that hold a monopoly over the drug within the city. Parties of adventurers have failed to return from the desert, bar single survivors with tales of the wealth to be found, fuelling the rumors. Likewise the local prince has sent scouting parties into the desert, but these have failed to return.

A second reason for the city to be a hotbed of rumors is the re-appearance of an ancient evil artefact, the Orb of Midnight, the Lesser Half of which is known to have been hidden away for millennia to keep it from falling into the



wrong hands. The Temple of Sleepless Nights wants to restore the two halves for their own ends, but neither the Church of the Silver Mist or The Inevitable Order of Time want it falling into their clutches, though the latter only wish to restore the current balance between the two.

Midnight's Terror is not so much an adventure, as a situation that the players can be drawn or dropped into. The fractious faiths within the city are all interested in obtaining the Orb of Midnight and would be prepared to hire the party to recover it. Likewise others may just be interested in the new source of Silver Sand, or the players may be interested in it and the potential wealth it represents for themselves rather than for others.

Plenty of opportunity for roleplay and battle are provided within the pages of this adventure. It takes the party from city of Thygasha out into the surrounding hills and deserts to two dungeons, the first small, and the second much larger. For each of the major locations several suggested encounters are given before the party even reaches them. Several of these encounters should be fun for the DM to run, with the *Incredible Hulk*-like Kobold (a personal favorite, and probably a favorite of any fan of *Knights of the Dinner Table*). In a sense, *Midnight's Terror* is a mini-campaign providing quite a few sessions of play for the interested party, and that really is the adventure's problem. The DM will need to work hard to get the characters involved to begin with, weaving the background into their own campaigns. Effort is also needed to continue their motivation to get from one location to another, but once there, they will find plenty of play as a reward.

Besides providing a short gazetteer of the city of Thygasha, *Midnight's Terror* gives the DM extra information in its appendices. These include the aforementioned dreams and nightmare to be used in conjunction with the city, but also details of two new spells and several magical items. For the DM without a copy of the *Kingdoms of Kalamar Campaign Sourcebook*, there is a decent glossary and an excerpt from the book about The Fellowship of Terror, the clergy and faith of The Temple of Sleepless Nights. This information is useful in that it allows a DM to run *Midnight's Terror* in their own game, but the scenario itself makes heavier use of its setting than the previous adventures released from Kenzer And Co. for *Third Edition D&D*.

Midnight's Terror is of lesser use to the DM who does not run a *Kingdoms of Kalamar* campaign. Yet if they are, then this will be suitable for later in their game after they have run the *Coin of Power* trilogy. Though needing some work upon the DM's part, this is a flexible, flavorsome adventure that should reward their tailoring of it to their players.

--Matthew Pook

(with thanks to Roj at Waylands Forge)

Pyramid Review

Ninja Burger: The Roleplaying Game

Published by [9th Level Games](#)

32 b&w pages; \$5.95



Ninja: Silent in the night, able to blend perfectly into the shadows and penetrate the toughest security systems. The ultimate in . . . fast food delivery?

Ninja Burger: The RPG is based on the popular website www.ninjaburger.com, a fictional website for a fast-food company that employs ninjas as delivery people. In it, you play as the employees of a Ninja Burger franchise, trained from birth in the arts of stealth, martial arts, and delivering hamburgers in thirty minutes or less. *Ninja Burger* uses 9th Level's "BEER Engine," as seen in *Kobolds Ate My Baby!*, and is an extremely simple system meant for quick 'beer-and-pretzels' games. As such, *Ninja Burger* is more of a complex boardgame than an RPG.

Character generation is quick and random, with four stats: Strength, Agility, Ki, and Extraneous, all determined with a 3d6. The usage of Strength and Agility is obvious, with Ki reflecting a Ninja's intelligence, knowledge, and general centeredness with the universe, and Extraneous being used for anything that the other three stats don't handle. One also randomly rolls for an Ancestral Clan, which modifies your Ninja's stats slightly, and for your Ninja's skill masteries. Lastly, all ninjas have access to Ninja Magic and Ninja Pockets. Ninja Magic is your standard cinematic array of tricks, and Ninja Pockets allow you to pull random items out of your Ninja's pockets.

The feature of this game that provides some of the most amusement is the option to perform multiple actions during a turn. However, you must declare **all** of your actions before you roll dice, and if your rolls make later actions stupid or nonsensical . . . well, that's life. You may attempt a skill roll in order to try and stop taking unwise actions, sparing your ninja failure and loss of honor when your attempt to pull a weapon from your pocket and attack a security guard instead has you attacking with a tasty Ninja Burger Meal.

However, you are not alone in your quest to deliver greasy, fatty food to highly secure installations. Opposing the glorious world-wide reign of Ninja Burger is their mortal enemies: Samuari Burger ("Our Way, Right Away!"), Otaku Bell, and the nefarious Lo Cal clan, servants of the incredibly evil and incredibly health-conscious overlord, Lo Cal. Add to this the Oni Oni Parcel Service, Human Resource Managers, and the most fearful of foes, the Customer, and it is easy to see why Ninja Burger employees are so highly trained.

While not deep by any means, the *Ninja Burger RPG* is quite fun and manages to be humorous without becoming grating. While the game itself is very light, the premise can carry a lengthy campaign with a little work. Much of the humor is from the incongruity -- ninja delivering burgers to Area 51, for example -- as well as the array of optional "house rules" in the game. For example, if your ninja rolls two 1's on any roll of two dice, he becomes Snake Eyes (from the *G.I. Joe* cartoon). This saves you from whatever situation you might have been in, provides you the coolest ninja costume and weapons, but also prevents you from speaking until someone else assumes the mantle of Snake Eyes. Also, in a *Paranoia*-like twist, each clan often has a secret mission to accomplish during each delivery, often forcing players to work at cross-purposes.

The book itself is simply laid out, with few typographical errors and a smattering of generic ninja art, with a couple of four-panel comic strips. It's mostly text, so that despite the fluffy content of the game and the few pages, the book is complete and does not skimp on important points. The main criticism that could be made is the game isn't much of an RPG -- it's a light tactical board game as written. You aren't expected to get too attached to your characters, and not unlike *Paranoia* easy provisions are made for the player who gets his ninja killed to jump right back into the game. Still, the concept is generic and easily portable and enough information is included that one could expand this into a

full-blown campaign if desired. Even as is, it's good clean fun in black pajamas, and a great game to pull out as a break or a change of pace, and hard to resist at a mere \$6. "You WILL experience the Ninja Burger difference!"

--*Damien Wellman*

Best Laid Plans

As I write this, I'm a couple of hours away from riding to Orlando for the World Yo-Yo Contest (as foretold in previous columns), as part of my continuing commitment not to be fired from my Day Job.

I haven't been to bed yet, although I was *supposed* to go a handful of hours ago. Hopefully I'll finish this column in time to wrap up the mag before I need to go.

That's the plan currently.

But plans have a way of going awry; if this one does, I'll fall back on Plan B.

Planning is, in a nutshell, why I don't really have much interest in playing *Shadowrun*, or other cyberpunk games.

See, in all the cyberpunk sessions and adventures I've seen, the game session revolves around a mission of sorts. The heroes are given their goals ahead of time, and they have time to plan it. Although this idea is pretty straightforward, it's also more or less the antithesis of most other roleplaying game scenarios.

In most other games, the heroes have adventures thrust upon them. This can be mild, like in a fantasy game where the adventurers wander into the Temple Shir-Li, preparing for nothing more than having 2d12 random alphabetical monsters thrown at them. Sure, they can plan what supplies they take, but in general planning for one dungeon is the same as another, and doesn't take much time. Or the adventure can allow *no* planning, like in most supers games, where it's not unusual for the heroes to have brightly clad trouble fall from the sky directly in front of them. Regardless, the characters (and players) don't really have much time -- or need -- to plan.

This isn't the case with the cyberpunk games I've seen. In these, the adventurers know in advance what they're expected to do, usually with a lot of available planning time (both in game and out) and access to considerable resources, like blueprints for the building where the adventure takes place, dossiers on the major characters and their abilities, and so on. Sure, in typical cyberpunk fashion Mr. Johnson hasn't been entirely forthcoming -- and thus the adventure doesn't go entirely as planned -- but the heroes generally have a lot more information than other genres.

As such, whenever I watched my friends play in their *Shadowrun* campaign, I'd actually be watching them plan.

And plan.

And plan.

Plan A generally consisted of fighting into (or out of) the location.

Plan B generally consisted of sneaking into (or out of) the location.

The *real* planning would begin with Plan C, and progress forward. Thus fighting their way out was always an option, but it was usually the last option. They'd generally stop when they reached plan H or so . . . meaning they'd have six fully formed plans and contingencies, with "Let's try to get out of here!" and "Let's shoot our way out of here!" as fall-backs.

So in a session that would last six hours, five hours and forty-eight minutes would be devoted to planning, and the actual adventure would take twelve minutes. At least that's how it seemed to me. It might have been thirteen minutes. Anyway, the point is that there wasn't much actual roleplaying, per se, so much as sitting around, postulating what might happen. By the time the actual adventure was ready to start, it generally went off without a hitch, since there were contingencies and sub-plans to account for most situations. Sure, there would be the occasional triple-cross and completely unforeseeable problem . . . but that's what Plans A and B were for.

Yes, I know that planning is, in theory, roleplaying. In practice I'm not sure I count it, simply because most of the in-

game planning I've both experienced and done in roleplaying games has been more or less out of character . . . it's the *players* who are sitting around, preparing down to the last detail.

Anyway, there's absolutely nothing wrong with this style of gaming; it's a simulationist treatment of the subject, and perfectly logical. If you have two days to plan breaking into EvilBigCo, you're going to come up with something better than, "Get 'em!" And in the Real World, groups spend hours, days, or months planning intricate operations, crimes, and scenarios (both actual and hypothetical). But I personally don't have much interest in determining what to do in Plan F if the guard in the elevator has heavy armor, thus negating the possibility of a quiet snipe.

Having said that, I also don't mind running (or playing) the occasional planning adventure; it *is* fun to see a carefully orchestrated plan come together . . . or fall apart. And I've always wanted to extend some of the same principles of the cyberpunk planning adventure to other genres. What would a standard fantasy dungeon crawl adventure be like if the heroes had the exact blueprints of the dungeon ahead of time, complete with secret rooms, traps, and the like . . . only without knowing any of the occupants? (Maybe the plans are a couple decades old.) What if the heroes in a Supers campaign have exact information on the abilities -- and weaknesses -- of a new villainous team (preferably one much stronger than the PCs)? What would an adventure in a high magic/power world, like *Mage* or *In Nomine*, look like if the heroes knew an exact timetable of their target's actions beforehand (thanks to temporal magic, precognition, or other trickery)?

Anyway, constant planning isn't my cup of tea, and I might be interested in playing in a *Shadowrun* game if I can be convinced that wouldn't be the focus. (In particular I think playing a gonzo photojournalist would be a blast.) But that doesn't mean I can't take the principles that allow such planning and use it in my own games.

Now if you'll excuse me, my plans are falling apart, and I need to depart. For those of you who need to get in contact with me, I should be back Monday.

At least, that's my plan.

* * *

Originally I was going to do a special drawn edition of Random Thought Table for this week, since I thought that 1) it might be kinda neat, and 2) it might be faster than writing a column. I was wrong on both counts, for roughly the same reason: I have the artistic talent of a wounded water buffalo clutching a Sharpie in its shattered hoof.

But that's never stopped me in the past from subjecting my mistakes unto others, and I don't see why now should be any different.

I hope you enjoy . . . but it wouldn't surprise me in the slightest if you don't.



Sleep deprivation and art seldom mix.

--*Steven Marsh*

* * *

*Last week's answer: **Ident-A-Kit Fingerprints**, from Sleuth Games (labeled part of the **Mercenaries, Spies, & Private Eyes** line, but actually a generic supplement)*

(Three stars) "Gold buys progress. It buys art, purchases medicine, builds bridges and rewards the scientist. Gold and trade are the cornerstones of any good society. And wherever this is gold, there must be people who help gather and distribute it."



Iron Ref 2: Electric Boogaloo

Three competitors. Three minds of the roleplaying world, each representing a different gaming genre, have accepted the Iron Ref challenge.

Three secret ingredients. Selected by a special guest, three ingredients -- plot elements, story pieces, or other oddities -- are selected for the challengers to incorporate into their concoctions.

2000 words. Each competitor has two thousand words -- and no more -- to devise a generic scenario in their genre incorporating all three secret ingredients.

24 hours. And they have one day to work their magic.

Who shall emerge, victorious, as the Iron Ref?

* * *

Our challengers, and their respective genres, are:

Jo Ramsay, writer of fine *In Nomine* material and evil genius behind the upcoming *GURPS Screampunk*, will be representing the **Horror** genre.

Sandy Antunes, mastermind behind [RPG.net](http://www.rpg.net) and Knower of Things Scientific, will be representing the **Sci Fi** genre.

Chad Underkoffler, frequent *Pyramid* contributor and known conspirator for the *Unknown Armies RPG*, will be representing the (Modern) **Fantasy** genre.

* * *

The secret ingredients have again been smuggled out of an underground lab by **Kenneth Hite**, the wizard behind [Suppressed Transmission](#), and creator of more roleplaying material than we can stake a schtick at. And we *still* think he's the best there is at supplying secret ingredients.

Stop reading if you don't want to know the secret ingredients!

This competition's secret ingredients are:

Fiddly Bits

The second Iron Ref competition was held from 10 AM Wednesday July 25th, EST until 10 AM Thursday July 26th, EST. This was primarily done because one of our competitors (let's call her "Jo") lives in England, which appearantly uses a different means of telling time than Florida. So, it seems, does Texas . . . although it's not as weird as England's time frame. Anyway, our standard midnight-to-midnight system wouldn't have worked as well, so we adjusted things accordingly. No one seemed to mind.

This is our second Iron Ref competition. Our first one was from February 2, 2001, and is at <http://www.sjgames.com/pyramid/login/article.cgi?2082>.

- The year 1863
- A sudden flock of mysterious bats
- Chocolate

Without further adieu, then, here are the results of this competition:

Horror: [Feed the Tree](#), by *Jo Ramsay*

SciFi: [Fort Sumter Syndrome](#), by *Sandy Antunes*

Fantasy: [Bitter Water, Sweet Magic](#), by *Chad Underkoffler*

Weird Prisons as Campaign Settings

or

"You Can Check Out Anytime You Like, But You Can Never Leave."

by Royce Easton Day

Raina pushed her way through the thick tangle of spiny underbrush that covered the floor of the dark woods. Until three days ago the brush prevented her and the other children from casually walking into the woods that surrounded the Monastery. Until three days ago she could never hear things in her mind, push things with her mind. Until three days ago her tiny world made sense.

Raina focused her will and shoved more of the spiny brush out of the way with a mere thought. She'd been travelling for hours now, and there was no sign that the woods would ever end. The trees above her formed a thick canopy, blocking much of the view forward.

She made her way a few more feet. Ahead, the woods finally began to part. There was a clearing ahead. Open ground. Escape!

Raina. *Brother Martin's voice came from out of nowhere. Raina, please stop.*

Raina pushed the last bit of dangerous brush out of the way. Ahead was clear ground, past that a long, winding, flowing body of water. A river, Raina recalled from her lessons. She ran out into the open . . .

. . . straight into Brother Martin's arms. Two Guardians took hold of her shoulders, forcing her to the ground.

"Raina, why did you run away?" Brother Martin looked down on her with no anger in his face, just pity.

"Why?" Raina cried. "Why shouldn't I? What does Monastery do with the children that grow up? Why are there woods surrounding everything? Why can I push things with my mind? Why can't I leave? Why can't I remember how I got here?"

"So many questions," Brother Martin said sadly. The Guardians forced her to her feet and began to march her along a path that opened up in front of the black-robed monk. "Don't worry, young Raina. Soon you won't have any more questions in your head to worry over."

* * *

Prisons are a common theme in books, movies, and roleplaying games. The reasons are obvious: An isolated setting where the protagonists are automatically set against their (wrongful, one hopes) oppressors is an easy way to create a cauldron of dramatic possibilities.

But sometimes things aren't so obvious. The "prison" may look like a pleasant seaside resort or a fantastic pocket universe. The protagonists may have no idea how they got there, or who they are. Perhaps they have no idea they're in a prison at all!

Trapping the characters in a weird setting, whether it's a true prison or just an enclosed area, with only a limited knowledge of their surroundings, will provide the PCS with a significant challenge as they try and figure out the rules of their world. If they're lucky, they'll be able to find their way out. If they're very lucky, they'll figure out how they got there in the first place . . .

Awareness

One of the first questions the GM must answer when setting up a Weird Prisons campaign is how much the PCs know about their situation. A group of modern characters who suddenly find themselves dumped into [The Hole](#) will react very differently than a group of low-tech farmers who suddenly figure out their pleasant little valley is really a huge section of a life support module onboard an ancient starship.

We're where?

The easiest option from the GM's point of view. The characters know they're trapped somewhere, even if it is unfamiliar or very odd environment. Perhaps they've been teleported by a wizard into a pocket dimension, which may have radically different physical laws. Or maybe they're just stuck in a maze filled with traps, and must find their way out. Often the PCS may be suffering from a short period of memory loss, especially if their captors don't wish them to have any clues about how to find the exit to their prison.

Forgotten

Most often used for settings that aren't actually prisons, just structures so old and vast that a person might not know what the word "outside" means. Generations of people have lived and died here, until the memory of their home's construction has been forgotten, or lost in the realm of myth. Discovering where they are might be a slow process of deduction from clues scattered around their environment, or a sudden, shining revelation as they tumble down the rabbit hole into the airlock leading to the rest of the ship. Classic examples include the generation starship from Robert A. Heinlien's *Orphans of the Sky* and the titanic, mad-house Alpha Complex of West End Games' *Paranoia!*

Everything You Know is Wrong

Similar to the Forgotten option, except that The Truth hasn't been lost, it's been deliberately hidden by the forces controlling the prison. This option is especially appropriate when combined with the Disguised setting and the Experimentation reason. Though certainly dramatic, the Everything You Know is Wrong option is difficult to pull off without making it seem like an arbitrary GM fiat. Players are best tipped off about their world by finding odd little discrepancies between what they see and what they "know" they should be seeing. For example, in the film *Dark City*, the protagonist only gradually notices that the sun never seems to rise, and that no one seems to be able to remember how to get to Shell Beach.

Settings

What the prison looks like is going to establish much of the ambiance. Is it obvious that they can't leave, or does it just seem like the situation is conspiring against them? Are the characters trapped in a huge city, filled with winding streets that never seem to lead outward, or are they in a small and quiet monastery surrounded by thick, impassable woods?

Isolated

It's obvious that the characters are trapped wherever they are, but there isn't much they can do about it (yet, anyway). Typical isolated facilities are such things as the stereotypical monster-filled dungeon a fantasy villain might toss them into, a small seaside village guarded by malicious weather balloons ala *The Prisoner*, or perhaps a gigantic airship that never lands, and the control room is locked off . . .

Disguised

A more typical setting for a "Forgotten" or "Everything You Know is Wrong" campaign is a prison that no one knows is a prison. The important thing to remember in this setting is that initially the characters don't realize that they can't leave. As the PCs attempt to get out they should find more and more inexplicable obstacles in their path, from misplaced street signs to corridors that seem to loop in on themselves. As they encounter even greater frustrations, they may finally realize that someone is deliberately preventing them from leaving.

Guards & Warders

Every prison has guards, even if they just let their subjects wander about while they watch on hidden cameras. If the characters know they're in a prison, the guards should be fairly obvious, even if their uniforms are identical, neatly-pressed suits. The guards in a disguised prison will be harder to spot. Are those pale men on the corner just waiting for a bus, or watching for the PCs' next move?

Reasons

Unless the GM wishes to be really malicious, he should give the PCs a chance to figure out why they're where they are. Typical reasons include:

Imprisonment

Rightfully or wrongfully, guilty or innocent, the PCs have been imprisoned for a crime. They may face just incarceration, or perhaps experimentation in their prison's many corridors or torturous traps. The important distinction is they have a fair idea of where they are. Or course they may not remember how they got there, or who put them there, or where exactly "there" is . . .

Accident

Whatever the prison is, the PCs are there entirely by accident, either by chance or because they were born there. Perhaps they were exploring and stumbled across the prison, or accidentally activated long inert machinery that transported them there. If the prison is disguised, or forgotten, the inmates may take some convincing that they're actually imprisoned in the first place. And if there are warders around, they may not take kindly to the PCs disrupting the situation.

Experimentation

Sometimes a prison isn't there to merely hold inmates, it's part of a bizarre psychological experiment. Perhaps the prison has a veneer of normality, in order to keep the prisoners from noticing subtle changes in the environment. Or perhaps the entire complex is a gigantic rat's maze, and heaven help the subject who doesn't figure out how to get to the cheese.

Entertainment

The PCs aren't imprisoned for punishment or science, they're there for the amusement of the masses, or perhaps to satisfy the twisted desires of a madman. Such prisons will probably feature ingenious deathtraps and lethal puzzles, as the PCs attempt to traverse its confines and try and find a way out. But they'd better be entertaining along the way, for low ratings will mean the death of the show, and themselves.

Goals

Unless the PCs actually enjoy being trapped in their environment, a campaign set in a weird prison will have at least one of the following goals.

Get the answers!

Why are they here? Who sent them there? Who built the prison and why? All of these are questions that are likely to be asked by the PCs. Depending on how long the GM and the players want to drag out the campaign the answers may be dribbled out over several sessions as they discover the rules of their environment, or come in a rush as they dramatically confront the prison's operators.

Spread the truth!

Once the PCs learn what's going on, the next logical step is to spread the word. If the prison is disguised or forgotten this may be harder than it looks. Few people will want to believe that they're trapped, especially if there are legends that outside the confines of their prison is a wasteland. On the other hand if it's obvious that the prison is a prison, the hard part might be keeping the revelation from the guards, especially if the characters are getting ready to make a mass escape attempt.

Get out!

This is the ultimate goal of Weird Prison campaign. Whether the PCs wish to just escape on their own, or break out the entire prison population is up to them. Depending on the circumstances (perhaps the generation ship they're trapped on is headed for a crash landing and must be evacuated), they may have little choice in the matter.

If the GM wants to put an ironic twist on the whole campaign, he should keep the ending of *The Prisoner* in mind. Remember, just because the PCs have left the prison grounds, it doesn't mean that they've truly escaped . . .

Example Settings

The Factory

Work, work, work . . . Work a sixteen hour shift on the assembly line, catch a quick meal and few hours sleep, then start the shift all over again. The Factory is an enormous structure, with the ceilings lost in darkness above, and the miles long assembly line lit by dim, naked bulbs hanging overhead. The noise of the machine presses, drills, and hydraulics is overwhelming, allowing little chance for conversation. Parts come in through a hatch at one end of the line, and the completed units exit at another. Food comes from the cafeteria, served by blank faced chefs who never bother with idle conversation. You catch your winks in the bunkroom, and most of the time you're too tired to chatter.

The characters know they've been working on the line for quite a while now. Gradually some might become aware that they can't quite remember how they got there, or what on earth they're assembling. But there isn't much time to investigate things outside of sleeping hours, and they have to be careful. The Factory itself never shuts down, and sometimes they can catch a glimpse of shadows walking along the catwalks up above.

The Monastery in the Woods

The Monastery of St. Jerome Emiliani is a gentle place. The old stone buildings sit in a cleared field in the center of a thick forest. Warm and comfortable dormitories house the ranks of orphaned children, who are watched over with gentle care by Brother Martin and his helpers. The children there were abandoned by their parents, or so they are told, and left to the Monastery to be raised and schooled.

The children are also watched over by Brother Martin's Guardians, large monks who don't speak a great deal and spend much of the time patrolling the border of the woods. Which seems strange, since the woods are so full of brambles and

prickly bushes that walking through them is almost impossible.

When a child physically matures, their time at the Monastery is limited. No one is quite sure what happens to them, but they all leave very soon. Sometimes they leave even earlier, usually because they're sick, often complaining of headaches, or voices in their heads. Sometimes they're obviously menaced by demons, as the area around them grows inexplicably cold or hot, or objects fly by themselves off the tables and shelves.

And no one leaves on their own. The woods are far too dangerous to try and walk through. Sometimes a child tries to run away, but Brother Martin and the Guardians always bring them back. Most don't try, however, for the ones that come back always have blank expressions on their faces, and don't remember their old friends very well, even though they insist they're very happy now.

The Maze

The city of Caledonia is a model of modern Victorian efficiency. Those newfangled electric lights insure that the streets are busy twenty-four hours a day, without the risk of explosion the old gas models had. The steam-powered factories churn out enormous quantities of goods. Mechanical constables patrol the streets, insuring the rabble keep in line. Food and other goods not produced by the city can be ordered through catalogs and delivered straight to the corner store, or sometimes even to one's home, via the marvelous pneumatic tube system.

Like any modern city however, the street system leaves something to be desired. The towering, five story tall brick buildings overhang a series of winding streets and alleyways that would give Daedalus fits. Sensible folk stick to their own neighborhoods, rather than risk getting lost, depending on the Underground for transport to the factories or the museums and concert halls at the center of town. Many people have attempted to produce maps to help alleviate the confusion, but those cartographers inevitably go out of business quickly, often before they're able to print anything. Sometimes their businesses are even burned to the ground by those frightful anarchists.

Even more rarely a madman sometimes makes his way to the city square, claiming he's tried to find his way out of the city, only to discover the streets bend back onto themselves. Ridiculous nonsense, of course. Fortunately the constables take care of those poor disturbed fellows, escorting them to Bedlam, along with other folk who try to breach the walls around High Hill, where the gentry, the industrialists, and the Lord Mayor live, watching over their fellow citizens with a benevolent eye.

Children of the Village

Ever wonder where Number Two gets his army of Watchers and white-helmeted goons to watch over the citizens of The Village? The episode "The Girl Who Was Death" gives a hint, showing Number Six telling a tale to the children housed in the Village Orphanage. Ever wonder what kind of jobs those kids could look forward to when they grow up? After all, only a person raised in the Village itself could possibly be trusted with guarding the place!

This is a chance to do a more lighthearted Weird Prisons campaign. Being the guards means the PCs have slightly more power than the prisoners. But being in The Village probably means they're as clueless as Number Six when comes to figuring out what's really going on in Number Two's head. And after the events of "Fallout" will they be able to function in the Real World after The Village falls apart?

* * *

The two fallen trees had crushed the Guardians, but Brother Martin had jumped safely out of the way-- almost. The oak's thick trunk lay across his crushed legs, trapping him underneath. Raina felt a weird sensation, not quite horror, not quite glee, as she looked at her handiwork.

"Young Raina-- you can't-- leave," Brother Martin gasped.

She shook her head. "I'm going. You can't stop me."

"You don't understand-- God has made you different." The black robed monk's face twisted in pain. "If you are-- discovered-- you'll be hunted down-- like a dog. You're safe in the-- monastery."

*"I don't want to be safe, I want to be free." Raina turned away and started walking towards the river. **Don't worry, Brother**, she thought towards him. **I'll return someday. My friends are still in the Monastery, and I will not leave them there forever.***

Inspirations

Books

- *Orphans of the Sky*, Robert A. Heinlein. One of the first science-fiction novels to explore the idea of a generation ship whose crew has forgotten they're onboard a ship.
- *The House of Stairs*, William Sleator. A group of teenagers are trapped in a huge structure that seems to consist of nothing except stairs and platforms. A creepy and downbeat young adult novel.

Games

- *Flight 13*, W. G. Armintrout. A passenger jet must make an emergency landing in Austin, TX. Or at least a place that looks like Austin, TX . . .
- *GURPS The Prisoner*, David Ladyman. Steve Jackson Games' adaptation of the classic 60's TV series.
- *Paranoia!*, Greg Costigyan, others. Alpha Complex is home, The Computer is your friend, and Outside (whatever that is) is filled with Commie mutant traitors. West End's classic game of insane computers, trigger happy clones, and lunatic bureaucracy.

Film

- *Cube*. Several people wake up inside a building consisting of thousands of identical, booby-trapped rooms, with no food, no water, and few clues on how to get out.
- *Dark City*. An amnesiac man awakens in a Noir-styled city where it's always night, he's been accused of a murder he doesn't remember committing, and Strangers are hunting him.
- *The Matrix*. Though it fails the Second Law of Thermodynamics, The Matrix is a good movie for a very cinematic take on the Everything You Know is Wrong campaign.
- *The Truman Show*. A man is raised from birth believing he lives in a pleasant suburban community, when actually he's trapped inside a giant TV studio as part of the ultimate "reality" TV series.

Television

- *Dungeons & Dragons*. Six modern kids are stuck trying to find an exit from a familiar looking fantasy universe.
- *Land of the Lost*. A father and his two kids are sucked into a pocket universe/zoo filled with dinosaurs, lizard-like humanoids, super-science, and lost civilizations. The original 70's series had a few episodes written by such well-known science fictions authors such as David Gerrold and Larry Niven. The 90's remake has better special effects, and far worse plots and characters.
- *Nowhere Man*. Thomas Veil took one photograph, and now a shadowy government organization has taken away his entire life. Though more of an Illuminati style show, Nowhere Man is a good example of how villains might control the environment around the PCs.
- *Star Trek* episode "For the World is Hollow and I Have Touched the Sky." Kirk and company discover a generation ship that has forgotten its purpose, and is on a collision course with an inhabited world.
- *The Prisoner*. The man known as Number Six never stops trying to leave the idyllic, inescapable Village. Episodes are now available in VHS and DVD format.

The Starlost. A farmer (2001's Keir Dullea) discovers his community is just one of a vast number of isolated habitats onboard a runaway starship. While it's hard to classify this show as "recommended," it is the only example of an episodic series set on a generation ship to date. Awful scripts, acting, special effects, plus a non-existent budget doomed this Canadian series from the start. Later adapted into a novel *Phoenix Without Ashes* by Harlan Ellison, who initially backed the television project.

Pyramid Review

Shadow World Master Atlas, Third Edition (for Rolemaster)

Published by [Eidolon Studio](#)

Written by Terry Kevin Amthor

222 b/w pages (plus 8 color map pages); \$30.00

The Shadow World, once the background world for ICE's fantasy game *Rolemaster*, has found a home with one of its creators, Terry K. Amthor. His one-man company Eidolon Studio has already published three regional sourcebooks with completely new material, and now he has revisited the introduction to this world of high fantasy, the *Shadow World Master Atlas*.

For those who are unacquainted with it, Kulthea -- the Shadow World -- is a planet of many continents and a myriad of cultures, ranging from primitive tribes to civilizations on the verge of the industrial stage. While these cultures are often isolated from each other by oceans, mountains or magical barriers, there are some organizations whose power and ambitions span the globe. The most prominent of these are the Loremasters, benevolent mages who prefer giving advice to more direct ways of interference; the Dragonlords, an evil cabal of powerful shapechangers; and the Navigators, a guild of journey guides whose services include instantaneous teleportation for those who can afford it. The inhabitants of the world are standard issue (humans, dwarves, elves and some oddballs), but the strength and charm of this setting derives less from the originality of its ingredients and more from their unique treatment: in spite of its traditional fantasy trappings, Kulthea's nearest relatives are science fantasy settings like Tekumel or Jorune. The forces behind magic and other supernatural events may not be understood by anyone, but they are not unexplainable per se.

In its previous incarnations, the *Atlas* struck me as one of the weaker efforts of the line and I was anxious to see whether the third edition would hold up to the high expectations kindled by the three sourcebooks mentioned above. As with those books, the 222 pages of the Atlas are spiral bound, but this is the only clear sign of its small press origin; the interior appearance of the book benefits greatly from the author's day job as designer and layout artist. Some of the illustrations are culled from old ICE books, but most are manipulated photographs and 3D renderings. While the rendered images do not work all that well for me (part of the problem might be printing out color images in black and white), the photos are well done and give a lot atmosphere. The poster map of Kulthea from the earlier editions is appended in the form of 8 separate color printouts, which appears as something of a stop-gap measure to me.

The book starts off with explanations about the game terms used in the book and system conversion notes. While I question the wisdom of putting them up front -- not the most evocative invitation to a world of fantasy - they are certainly useful, especially since *Rolemaster* is not exactly the most popular of rule systems. The description of the world itself begins from a far way away, with the Kulthean star system and the moons as the topic of the second chapter, "The Heavens." This approach emphasizes the feeling that Kulthea is part of our own universe, a place where the laws of nature might have been expanded a bit, but are not superseded completely by the laws of legend. (Or the laws of the dungeoncrawl.) Since two of the five moons are home to the most powerful gods, they actually have a lot of import on everyday life. Orhan, the largest moon, is the paradise like realm of the Lords of Orhan, whereas Charon is riddled with gates to darker dimensions.

A short overview of weather and climate leads into Part Four: The Lands, wherein all continents on the western hemisphere are given a short overview. Although only few places get more than a broad glance, I came across a lot of intriguing ideas. Some of the old material from the ICE *Shadow World* books was also incorporated here, but for the most part, this is all new information, even including a first outlook about what awaits on the mysterious eastern

hemisphere.

The next chapters form something of a naturalist (or in some parts, an unnaturalist) guide to Kulthea. Animals, monsters, demons, herbs, plants, gods . . . even gems and metals are described in a nice mixture of real world info and fantasy. The Kaeden, an artificially created race of horrible insectmen, are my personal favorite of the many beasties compiled here, but what I like best is that the emphasis is on presenting a coherent picture of a world and not on creating a menagerie of freakish things to throw at your players. An example of this is the chapter on demons (some of whom are, admittedly, more than a little freakish) that also deals with cosmology and the Six Pales, home planes of the most frequently summoned demons.

This attention to atmospheric detail is also apparent in the chapter about magic, where, along with "natural" phenomena caused by Kultheas inherent essence, the manifestation of magic spells are discussed -- the appearance of defensive magic differs from that of a flying spell, and both might differ from one mage to the other. This chapter should be required reading for *Rolemaster* players, but it will also be useful for everybody else.

The most outstanding part of the *Atlas* is the History of the World, recounting the most important events from thousands of years, with increased detail towards the present year of 6054 Third Era -- a whole three pages are devoted to the year 6053. While this is not an easy read, it is an entertaining and rewarding one, providing you with lots of story hooks and potential campaign settings. A chapter on organizations and persons of note concludes the book, followed by appendices that include linguistic notes (along with short vocabularies), some rule notes and an index.

For everyone who is looking for a new world background, this is a very worthwhile purchase. Kulthea provides a stage for you that is full of depth and detail, but it is open enough for you to weave stories around and about the general frame. And, thanks to the fact that it was created by only one author, it avoids the design-by-committee ills that sometimes seem to crop up in the *Forgotten Realms* or the *World of Darkness*. Transition to other rule systems should not be a big hurdle -- there are conversion notes, and the best parts of the book are free of rules, anyway.

It is not recommended if you only want to add some ideas to an existing campaign of yours -- as noted above, the way the ideas are tied together is what makes this book shine, and anything taken away from the background will lose in the transition. Those who already have one of the former editions of the *Master Atlas* have to consider whether the new creatures and races, the geography overview and the updated history justify spending \$30 for the book.

In conclusion, the *Shadow World Master Atlas* is a wonderful introduction into a fantasy background that differs significantly from both the normal pseudo medieval fare and from exotic worlds like *Glorantha*, *Talislanta*, or *Tekumel*. If you have enough of elves, wizards and dragons then it will not differ enough to make you come back, however.

--Maik Hennebach

Pyramid Review

The Dark Side Sourcebook (for the Star Wars RPG)

Published by [Wizards of the Coast](#)

Designed by Bill Slavicsek, J.D. Wiker, and Cory Herndon

Illustrated by Jon Foster, Lee Bermejo, Dan Brereton, Tommy Lee Edwards, Doug Alexander Gregory, Ashley Wood, and Lucasfilm Ltd.

Edited by Brian Campbell and Michelle Carter

160 color page hardcover; \$29.95

Bad guys have more fun. You know it, I know it, and both Lucasfilm and Wizards of the Coast know it too. They're obviously a little nervous about this fact, and that means the *Dark Side Sourcebook* for the *Star Wars RPG* isn't everything it could have been. However, there's enough in this book to please all but the most demanding Sith Lords.

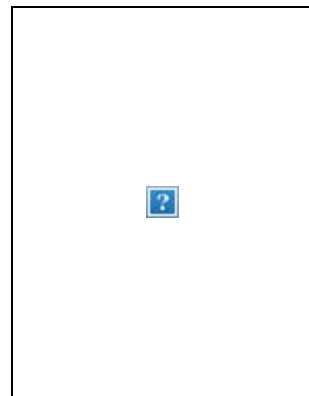
Like most of WotC's supplements, this book gives center stage to new abilities. After sketching out the history of the Dark Side in a couple of pages, Chapter Two devotes 25 pages to new skills, powers, and prestige classes. Most of these are Force-based skills -- characters can use alchemical concoctions to enhance equipment or mutate creatures, turn hordes of minions into their personal puppet show, drain Force and knowledge from others, and transfer their life essence to other bodies. New Feats include the ability to blast everyone around you with pure hatred, a Rage that makes Wookiees look even-tempered, and proficiencies in the deadly Sith Sword.

One of the nice features of the *Star Wars* system is that these abilities are theoretically accessible to almost any Force-sensitive character. An ethically flexible Jedi can study the darker arts if he is willing to pay the price. The powers themselves are limited by the fact that they require a minimum number of Dark Side points to be used. (Most of them also give a Dark Side point when they are used, greasing the character's slide into evil.) The *Star Wars* designers have struck a fine balance between temptation and damnation here. "Go ahead and dabble in the Dark Side," they seem to say, "but don't think you're going to get cool powers cheap. You'll have to do some nasty things, and we bet you're not as good at controlling yourself as you think you are."

Chapter Three picks up this theme and discusses the tricky job of gamemastering Dark Side player characters. It's a solid section of GM advice, but it's here that the themes of the book cross wires with the typical gamer. The resulting text doesn't ruin the book, but it does sound a little strange.

Here's where we get to what you and I both know. We know that most roleplaying games are all about killing people and taking their stuff. The average group of players loves to rampage through dungeons (Death Stars) slaying monsters (blasting storm troopers) and rescuing princesses (rescuing princesses). We also know that Luke is a goody two-shoes and that Darth Vader -- not Anakin Skywalker -- is the coolest guy in the galaxy. Therefore, we can conclude that while blasting your way through stormtroopers to overthrow the Empire is fun, it's even more fun to wear a black suit of armor and blow up Alderaan. Even the most lawfully good gaming group is occasionally going to want to let its hair down, roll up a bunch of Sith Lords, and crush that puny Rebellion once and for all.

Needless to say, this prospect terrifies Lucasfilm and Wizards of the Coast. Not only is it directly contrary to all the



stated themes of *Star Wars*, but the idea of "encouraging evil" must give the legal staff and publicity flacks nightmares. *Dungeons and Dragons* may have brought back the demons, but it certainly isn't encouraging gamers to play Asmodeus and Orcus. At the same time, the designers must know that a "*Dark Side* is only for gamemasters" book would sacrifice sales, spawn hoots of derision, and still be untrue to *Star Wars*. (The whole point of the Dark Side is that it tempts even the best heroes.)

So the designers have compromised. Yes, you're encouraged to run a Dark Side campaign, but only if the villains get theirs in the end. "Every dark side campaign has two possible endings," they write. "The heroes can turn away from the dark side and find redemption, or they can meet their nemesis in a final battle and go out in a blaze of glory." Victory for the bad guys is not an option in the *Star Wars* universe.

It's a reasonable decision, and the advice on how to bring a *Dark Side* campaign to a rousing close is useful, but it's hard not to hear the voice of Ned Flanders in the designers' insistence that evil must always get its comeuppance.

After negotiating this tricky subject, the book spends most of the rest of pages detailing the many villains of the *Star Wars* universe. The coverage is impressive -- every evil force-user from the comics, novels, and movies seems to get at least a few paragraphs. There's also a wide selection of creatures, generic Dark Side character templates, and some welcome details about the early conflicts of the Old Republic and the Sith Empire.

All this information makes *The Dark Side Sourcebook* extremely useful for gamemasters, whether they are creating antagonists or tempting player characters. It is well designed and colorfully illustrated -- but also just a little bit disappointing. The designers present useful rules, but they dance away from the joy of playing the villain. Are a few evil laughs and mustache twirls really so much to ask?

--Chris Aylott

Where Did I Leave My Wonderful Toys?

Last week I was at the 2001 World Yo-Yo Contest, serving as scorer and registration guru. During this time I had my IBM WorkPad z50, which (in theory) can keep up with the entirety of *Pyramid*.

I say "in theory" because the z50 is an odd duck in the world of computing. Released in 1999, it was designed to be a bridge between the palmtops made by Palm, and the bulky laptops of a "real" computer. It runs entirely off battery-saved memory, so it has no moving parts; as such, batteries can last 8-10 hours depending. It has a keyboard that's 95% the size of a laptop's. It has a modem for Internet and email access, and a word processor for writing.

And it failed miserably in the marketplace. It turns out that the z50 was far too big for those who wanted to use it for Palm-type organizing, and not powerful enough for those who needed a full-sized laptop. Really, it was only truly suitable for those who wanted to do light Internet work while on the road, and maybe write a word processing document or two.

In other words, it was pretty close to ideal for my purposes. At least, it was once they discontinued it, and started clearing them out of warehouses for \$300 or so each (instead of the \$900-1000 they wanted originally).

So anyway, in theory I can use this laptop to run the magazine. In practice doing such (in a hotel, stuck behind a registration table for 12 hours at a time, using a \$10 phone card) is very problematic. But between it and the \$1-per-4-minutes terminal in the lobby I was able to keep up with my email and newsgroups, and do some minor editing on the mag. But I wasn't able to get much done until I got home.

Which, by way of meandering preamble, brings me to this week's topic.

In many games, movies, and comics, the heroes are defined by their toys.

In the movies, Luke has his lightsaber, Han has his Millennium Falcon, and Bond has his gadgets and the blessing of the British government.

In the comics, Iron Man has his suit of powered armor, Batman has his utility belt, Green Lantern has his power ring, and the Incredible Hulk has his tattered purple shorts that always seem to fit him (or *don't* fit him, which explains why he's so ticked off all the time. "Hulk wedgied! RAARRRGGGHH!").

And PCs have their gear. Be it the armored giants of a Mecha campaign, the magic tomes of a fantasy game, or the super decked-out vehicles of an *Autoduel* campaign, sometimes our heroes are as much what they have as what they do.

So one of the most interesting things for me -- both as a player and a GM -- is to take those things away. This is usually temporary, of course . . . it's not good karma to strip a character of their stuff permanently if the player doesn't want to. But very often removing the heroes from their gear is a great way to emphasize that heroism is core to the person, not the equipment.

Luke needed to enter the viper's den of Jabba's palace without his lightsaber. Han loaned the Falcon to Lando. Bond gave up his job in *License to Kill*. And various superheroes lose their gizmos every other month. (You think they'd have toddler-restraint cords on their stuff . . .)

And, in all these situations, the heroes prevailed over their gearlessness. In some situations (like Luke's) the heroes even *facilitated* the removal of their equipment, to give them a strategic advantage later. Regardless, in all these situations the heroes were able to prove that they were more than their stuff. In fact, the lack of equipment might encourage a level of creativity in the players they might otherwise not exhibit.

For example, in *Fading Suns* most players will eventually end up with devices called shields, which are energy

barriers that stop sufficiently damaging attacks (not unlike the devices in *Dune*). In one game our group played in, we were on the swamp world of Severus. The GM thought it would be interesting to attack us with giant wasp-like insects. We ultimately learned that these creatures were attracted to -- and enraged by -- the frequency of the shields we wore. In other words, if we didn't turn off the shields, these beasts would constantly attack us.

Fading Suns is a fairly lethal system; without those shields, we were quite vulnerable. As such, an otherwise standard adventure was raised to a truly memorable level simply by removing one of our toys. And, near the adventure's climax, we had the idea to turn on one of the shields and plant it near the bad guy. Then we ran and hid. Lovely, sweet, enraged nature took care of the rest.

The trick with these kinds of adventures is to make sure it seems organic, and doesn't feel like you've taken away their stuff for no reason. Taking away the heroes' cyberarmor because it's No Cyberarmor Day on the planet isn't very sporting; but building an underwater adventure where the heroes can't wear their cyberarmor is perfectly fine. And, of course, the villains are constantly plotting to take away those wonderful toys from the heroes . . .

You may want to scale down the adventure so that it's a more appropriate challenge for the gear-less heroes. Then again, you can keep the challenge the same, making for a [very difficult adventure](#).

Finally, if you're looking for a way to put the twist on this old formula, have the heroes make up new characters *without* equipment . . . just random Schmoes. Then have them stumble across the heroes' equipment, with the idea that they need to use those items to figure out what happened to -- and save -- the heroes. This can be an interesting possibility to show how items *can* make the heroes. How would a random person use Iron Man's armor or Captain America's shield? What if -- through mistake or design -- a normal citizen were to get Bond's resources and authorization? Could a normal Rebellion pilot use the Millennium Falcon to save the galaxy's greatest heroes? And, since the players wouldn't be playing the standard heroes, the possibility for heroic sacrifice is that much greater . . .

In all, it's the unusual circumstances where the heroes' first instinct is to turn to their equipment. And sometimes the most memorable adventures are those where they can't.

* * *

On the car trip back from Orlando, I came up with a new car trip game that can be played by people with too much time on their hands who desperately want to keep from nodding off . . . like, say, people on car trips coming back from Orlando.

Anyway, come up with an initial actor and a movie role. Then name another actor to replace him or her. The actor should, ideally, be as amusing or incongruous as possible.

- "*Escape From New York* starring John Denver as Snake Plissken!"

The next player needs to come up with a movie that actor was in, and find another actor to replace the actor in that role. (The character is really only necessary for the first "link," so you know who's being replaced.) Again, the goal is amusement. Thus the next links in the chain might be:

- "*Oh, God!* starring Sean Connery!"
- "Billy Bob Thornton **is** James Bond in *Dr. No!*"
- "*Sling Blade*, starring Jim Carrey!"
- "*Ace Ventura: Pet Detective*, featuring the physical comedy of Orson Welles!"
- "*Transformers: The Movie* . . . starring James Stewart as the voice of Unicron!"
- "*Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*, starring the lovable Anthony Perkins!"
- "*Psycho II* . . . the evil never dies. With John Candy!"
- "*Planes, Trains, and Automobiles*, starring comic genius Jean Claude Van Damme!"

And so on. Sell the movie; make the other players anticipate the crossover. Of course, after each one of these (ideally) you'll probably be quoting a scene of that movie in the style of the new actor. (Menacing giant evil planet dialogue in

the style of Jimmy Stewart is a blast!) At least that's what *we* did . . . in between lots of laughing.

Repeat until everyone gets bored. Or, ideally, just *before* everyone gets bored . . . then find a way to wrap it back to the first actor. If you're looking for a way to cross genders, you might try to find a way to work in questionably gendered actors, cross-dressers, and movies involving cross-dressing.

(I wouldn't at all be surprised to learn this game exists elsewhere. But I've never seen it, and it kept us occupied for four hours. Then again, so does yarn . . .)

* * *

By the by, in the Day Job, two people in my office are going on vacation for two weeks. I'm not one of them. And we only have three folks who work in the office. As such, I'm going to be chained to a desk for two weeks, and may thus be more difficult to get in touch with. And after that I'm going to DragonCon. So basically August's a botch for speedy contact. I'll try to do what I can, but if I take a bit longer than normal to get in touch, it's not because I don't love you. Honest.

-*Steven Marsh*

* * *

Last week's answer: Mage: The Sorcerers Crusade, p. 152.

(*Two stars*) "The librarian, Lucius, had been motivated by unseen forces to wander the world for five years, searching for arcane knowledge. Upon his return, he began to search for clues to this 'missing time' -- and promptly vanished."

Knock, Knock: The Ratcliffe Highway Murders

"It is really wonderful and most interesting to pursue the successive steps of this monster, and to notice the absolute certainty with which the silent hieroglyphics of the case betray to us the whole process and movements of the bloody drama, not less surely and fully than if we had been ourselves hidden in Marr's shop, or had looked down from the heavens of mercy upon this hell-kite that knew not what mercy meant."

-- Thomas de Quincey, "On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts" (1854 Postscript)

An intriguing 77 years before [Jack the Ripper](#) held the East End in a paroxysm of horror, another killer, also likely never caught, beat Red Jack's record a mile or so farther south along the murderous ley lines running under London's Ratcliffe Highway. The Ratcliffe Highway murders, according to opiated genius Thomas de Quincey, were "the sublimest and most entire in their excellence that ever were committed," and the nationwide panic they evoked helped create the first modern police force. What else they created, and who (or what) created them, remains to be seen. So, in honor of the Gothick goodness of the brand-new **GURPS Screampunk**, let's knock some ideas around.

"The Dwelling House of Mr. Timothy Marr, 29, Ratcliff Highway, Man's Mercer, was entered this morning between the hours of Twelve and Two o'Clock, by some persons unknown, when the said Mr. Marr, Mrs. Celia Marr, his wife, Timothy their Infant Child in the cradle, and James Biggs, a servant lad, were all of them most inhumanly and barbarously Murdered!!"

-- Handbill printed by the Churchwardens of St. George in the East, Dec. 8, 1811

But first, the murders. On the early morning of December 8, 1811, housemaid Margaret Jewell returned to Timothy Marr's draper's shop at 29 Ratcliffe Highway from an unsuccessful errand. Unable to raise the house by knocking, she summoned help from the neighbors. Breaking in, they discovered Marr, his wife, his infant son, and the apprentice James Gowen dead and scattered about the shop with crushed skulls and slashed throats. A carpenter's maul discovered on the premises proved to be the murder weapon; although a matching ripping chisel also turned up in the Marrs' shop, only a knife or razor could have severed the throats of the family. The savagery of the murders, and the detail of the baby's needless death, created a furor; the parish wardens, the River Police, and even the Home Office posted rewards for information.

In the midst of this tumult, on December 19, the murderer struck again, this time at a public house just off the Ratcliffe Highway, the King's Arms at 81 New Gravel Lane. Again, a young woman escaped (incredibly, by sleeping through the whole affair) while the rest of the house died -- the innkeepers John and Elizabeth Williamson, and their maid Bridget Harrington. Again, the killer smashed the skulls and slashed the throats of the victims (from left to right, like Jack the Ripper 77 years later); again, he left his club (a chisel-crowbar) and took his razor away. The Williamsons' lodger, John Turner, escaped by knotting sheets together and lowering himself out the window. Again, the murderer was interrupted by poundings at the door; again, he fled out of the back of the house. He had killed seven people in twelve nights, and only Turner's eyewitness description ("a tall man in a Flushing coat") and the maul connected him at all with the material world.

"We think it our duty to inform you that from what appeared in Evidence previously to the death of Williams, together with what has appeared on a very full Examination this morning, that Williams was the perpetrator of the late murders in this neighbourhood; and we have also to add that we have every reason to hope that he alone was concerned."

-- Shadwell district magistrate report to the Home Secretary, Dec. 27, 1811

The day of the Williamsons' murder, the authorities belatedly discovered an owner's mark on the maul, the initials "J.P." Soon, the watch traced the maul and chisels to the tool-chest of German sailor John Peterson, who had left them at the Pear Tree Inn in nearby Wapping. As part of the general roundup of Irish and other undesirables, the magistrates questioned John Williams, a lodger at the Pear Tree, on December 24. Like many of the other suspects, Williams owned a bloody shirt (or one recently washed) and as a sailor had few ties to the neighborhood. After extremely dubious testimony against Williams by other lodgers, the magistrates (desperate for any progress) decided he was the key figure in the crimes. Before he could be arraigned, much less tried, however, Williams was found hanged in his cell on December 27. With a sigh of relief, the authorities considered his apparent suicide a transparent confession. On

New Years' Eve, Williams' body was paraded through the streets and then buried at the crossroads with a stake through his heart -- the traditional disposal of a suicide. The hangman drove in the stake with the very maul that had killed the Marr family.

"The particular outrage that has excited such feelings of horror and detestation in the Metropolis, and the perpetrators of which have escaped detection, is still wrapped up in mystery."

-- speech in Parliament of Prime Minister Spencer Perceval, Jan. 18, 1812

Mystery author P.D. James demonstrates fairly conclusively, in her history of the case (*The Maul and the Pear Tree*, with T.A. Critchley), that Williams was arrested, held, and investigated on the flimsiest of evidence. Not only did he have an alibi for the Williamson murder, the bloody shirt the authorities seemed to believe conclusive could not have been worn during the crime -- it was in the laundry on one of the nights, and not bloodied enough on the other. A government informant found a bloody knife hidden in the Pear Tree and claimed a share of the reward money despite only his word linking the blade to Williams. James and Critchley finger one William Ablass, a tall sailor of brutish temperament who had served with Williams; they allege that the witnesses blackened Williams' name after his death to split the reward, and that Ablass bribed the jailer and strangled Williams as an irrefutable frame-job. However, one is still left with the uncomfortable fact that the Ratcliffe Highway killings ended with Williams' death.

"At length, in [1811], Mr. Williams made his debut on the stage of Ratcliffe Highway, and executed those unparalleled murders which have procured for him such a brilliant and undying reputation Now it will be remembered, that in the first of these murders (that of the Marrs), the same incident (of a knocking at the door) soon after the work of extermination was complete, did actually occur, which the genius of Shakespeare has invented; and all good judges, and the most eminent dilettanti, acknowledged the felicity of Shakespeare's suggestion, as soon as it was actually realized."

-- Thomas de Quincey, "On the Knocking at the Gate in *Macbeth*"

The similarities don't stop with the two murder scenes. As de Quincey points out, they also have some intriguing parallels with Shakespeare's depiction of the [murder of Duncan](#) in *Macbeth*. Interestingly enough, on the very nights the murders occurred, de Quincey's fellow opium-addict, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, was earning the price of his next fix by lecturing on Shakespeare's plays -- including *Macbeth*. Could some opium- (or [mandragora](#)?) spawned murder-creature have taken the imagery from Coleridge's nigh-shamanic prose and re-created these sanguinary horrors? Or was there some other actor, deep within the Royal Society descended from John Dee, who saw the need to re-create the dramaturgickal magic of *Macbeth* on the Ratcliffe Highway? That year, 1811, George III finally went completely mad, leaving George IV as Prince Regent. As if in response, the Luddites began breaking machinery, the harvest failed, and disorders gripped the nation. Could occult dramaturges have used the *Macbeth* royal murder-ritual (perhaps amplified by its sequel on the [Twelfth Night](#)) to fend off the catastrophic [King Lear](#) ritual result of the royal madness, with its invasion from France, and the destruction of Britain? Prime Minister Perceval, who might have known (or discovered) the truth, died the next year, assassinated by a "lone madman."

"Down the Ratcliffe Highway, or our notion of it, faint ghosts, old stains and patterns blotch the woodchip. George's-in-the-East, that great, dead battery of a Hawksmoor church, part of his stifling symbol-net, his Tesla grid of terror and magnificence.

Timothy Marr, the draper and his wife, their infant child and their apprentice died near here.

Dispatched with maul and ripping chisel in the small hours of the nineteenth century.

Convenient atrocity, necessitating the origination of a police force, one much imitated since throughout the Western World.

Those things that breed in this idea space have their consequence, heavy as churches, they themselves the fossil dreams of architects."

-- Alan Moore, *The Moon and Serpent Grand Egyptian Theater of Marvels*

So, if the Ratcliffe Highway murders were dramaturgickal ritual, why choose Ratcliffe Highway? The word itself, evocative as it is of [Eliot's](#) "Rat's Alley, where the dead men lost their bones," actually comes from Red Cliff, referring to the stretch of the Thames at the Highway's end -- Execution Dock. Here, pirates (such as Captain William Kidd, executed there in 1701) hung in chains to be drowned by the incoming tide, human sacrifices to the god of the sea. In

1645, around the time builders exhumed an ornate sarcophagus from the dockland, a woman gave birth to the hideous Ratcliffe Monster. Well after the murders, a ghostly innkeeper (or vicar) haunted the Ratcliffe Highway, a true "ghost road" -- or ley line. Perhaps unsurprisingly to *From Hell* [sacred-geometry](#) fans, Williams' burial crossroads, the intersection of Cannon and Cable Streets, lies directly beneath Nicholas Hawksmoor's imposingly sorcerous church of St. George in the East. (Marr, it seems, died on the ground upon which Hawksmoor had wanted to build that church.) Mention of Hawksmoor, and of magickal church architecture, brings up the Freemasons, those "brothers" to the corsairs hung at the end of the Highway. Masonic ritual, of course, refers to the simultaneous death by hammer-blow to the head and knife slit throat meted out to those who have transgressed the Mysteries. (The third ceremonial Masonic death, of course, is hanging -- as meted out to John Williams.) The maul remains a key symbol of the Master Mark third-degree Mason; the crossroads burial evokes voodoo rituals to Legba -- and precautions against vampires.

"One fact, however, was striking, and fell in with the impression of his natural tiger character -- that his face wore at all times a bloodless ghastly pallor. 'You might imagine,' said my informant, 'that in his veins circulated not red life-blood . . . but a green sap that welled from no human heart.' His eyes seemed frozen and glazed, as if their light were all converged upon some victim lurking in the far background . . . [T]he oiliness and snaky insinuation of his demeanour counteracted the repulsiveness of his face, and amongst inexperienced young women won for him a very favourable reception."

-- Thomas de Quincey, "On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts" (1854 Postscript)

So what if Williams was actually the killer -- but he wasn't actually "John Williams"? Was Williams' "natural tiger character" that of the murder-loving [manticore](#)? Alternately, De Quincey's description, and the stake driven through Williams' heart, make us think of vampires; but his glazed, glowing eyes and "snaky insinuation" also evoke the Reptoids who (as conspiracy theorists warn us) secretly rule Britain, breeding into the royal family. Could the Prince Regent have demanded a royal sacrifice to mark his accession to the throne, leaving it to the secret community of Unseelie serpent-folk who had dwelt in Ratcliffe since Sir Walter Raleigh returned there from his expedition to the jungles of Guiana and [El Dorado](#)? Could the unholy birth of the Ratcliffe Monster of 1645 have been the first spawning of the Reptoid lineage that would ensnare all of England in its coils? Could Perceval's murder have been necessary, to secure the throne that the [Influencing Engine](#) had cleared by destroying the mind of the True King? Did Shakespeare and Hawksmoor jointly pave the way for the serpent-lords' ascension, with a Masonic maul beating a coronation march? Knock, enter, and find out.

Pyramid Review

Akrasia: Thief of Time (for d20)

Published by [Eden Studios](#)

Written by David Chart

Illustrated by Allen Douglas & Kieran Yanner

32 pages; \$8.95

Eden Studios, best known for the *Zombie RPG, All Flesh Must Be Eaten*, and the modern day alien conspiracy RPG, *Conspiracy X*, follow in the footsteps of Atlas Games and their Penumbra line by creating their own imprint under which to publish their own *d20* books. The first Odyssey title is *Akrasia: Thief of Time*, written by British author, David Chart.

Akrasia: Thief of Time describes itself as being not a scenario, but a vignette sourcebook, for characters of second through twelfth levels. The sourcebook aspect is an examination of the goddess Akrasia and her faith. The vignettes are a series of five individuals, plots and situations associated with the worship of Akrasia. These are designed to be inserted or woven into an existing campaign, or just plain played in between longer sessions of a DM's game.

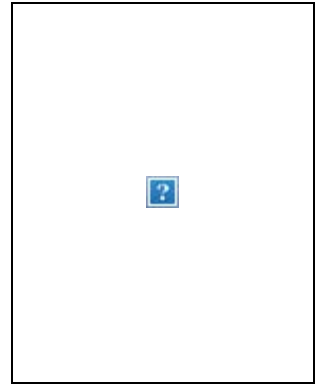
The goddess Akrasia is known as the Thief of Time, Goddess of Distraction, and the Delayer, among many other titles. When the gods divided the world between them, she was napping and so arrived late at the meeting. By this time there was nothing left. Upon reflection Akrasia saw that was something still left untaken, and so choose to become the goddess of failure and lost opportunity. Later, while working with the god of time, she successfully distracted him to steal from his hourglass and became the Thief of Time. As written, Akrasia is almost an afterthought or footnote among any pantheon of gods, and thus is easily written into most *d20* games that do have a pantheon of several or more gods.

Her worshippers appear to be harmless, but they are rather a malign influence upon society, being Chaotic Evil. Commonly, they seek to undermine the efforts of others, commonly by providing enjoyable distractions -- good food, fine wines, song, and entertainment. Other faithful work to prevent the completion of major projects by wrapping them up in bureaucratic red tape or endless debate and discussion. They and their goddess are opposed to both hard work and discipline, so even the strenuous application of Akrasia's tenets actually goes against those tenets! It is not unusual to find her worshippers to be victims of the very weakness of will and conviction that they themselves spread. Some do actually do make the effort and find themselves no longer believing in Akrasia after having completing some major task.

[SPOILER ALERT!]

The first vignette in *Akrasia: Thief of Time* is "The Sheltering Shrine." For characters of second to fourth levels, this takes place as the party finds themselves sheltering at a near-abandoned temple to Akrasia. This adventure is quite simple and can be slotted into a game at a moment's notice. The second vignette is actually a description of an NPC, Yaraemon the Bard, known for his highly diverting harp performances, but secretly a worshipper of Akrasia. He can be encountered anywhere and at any time in the player's careers, as the vignette gives three increasingly powerful versions of Yaraemon, which can be selected according to the current level of the party.

"The Way Inn" is the third vignette, and also the name of a popular inn. An Akrasia worshipper, who keeps this secret from the locals, runs it and thus prevents little from being done in the village. For characters of sixth to eighth levels,



this is not an easy plot to unravel, as it will be difficult to raise the interest of the villagers, distracted as they are by the services offered at the inn.

The situation in the fourth vignette, "Until The Rain Comes," is potentially more dangerous. Riverton sits astride a river, and the town has recently been subject to damaging floods. To prevent this from happening again, it has been proposed that embankments be built to control the floodwaters. Unfortunately, devotees of Akrasia are surreptitiously preventing this work from being begun. One method is bureaucracy; another is endless debate, often on pointless trivia. As with the previous vignette, getting to the bottom of this will be difficult because of the lack of really tangible acts upon the part of the Akrasia cultists.

The last vignette is the toughest, being designed characters of levels seven through ten. It details an actual temple to Akrasia, The Temple of Pleasant Delights. The objective here would be to destroy the facility, but a frontal assault would be most fraught. More successful would be actually turning the strictures of Akrasia's faith against her worshippers!

Each of the five vignettes comes with one or more hooks that the DM can use to get the players involved. He is also provided with details in each vignette of how it connects to the others in the book. The five make use of the background given on Akrasia and the game information provided in the appendix. This includes a new Prestige Class, the Distractor, who are the most dedicated of the followers of the Thief of Time. A sample NPC is also described, Litarra the Halfling, who has links throughout the vignettes, and like Yaraemon the Bard from the second vignette, is given three increasingly powerful sets of stats, so that she can be used whatever the party's level.

[END SPOILER ALERT]

The appendix also contains details of a new domain particular to Akrasia (Distraction), as well as seven new spells and four new magical items. One amusing magical item is that of Red Tape, which when bound around a document, forces a person to not only read it carefully, but fill it in if required to! Akrasia also has several magical creatures associated to her and these are included in the appendix as well. It is a pity though, that only the last vignette makes any real use of these creatures.

Akrasia: Thief of Time is an attractive and cleverly written supplement that can fit into almost any campaign with a large pantheon of gods. The goddess and her worshippers are well thought out and the information is put to good use in each of the vignettes. As structured through these intermittent vignettes, the book has more shelf life than an ordinary scenario. Further, the way in which Akrasia's faithful actually work (or not!) means more roleplay than swordplay will be needed to sift through the distractions to stop them. This means that players with a preference for combat will be disappointed, not to say frustrated at having a Chaotic Evil enemy whose actions tend towards the subtle and the intangible. The referee may need to take some care in how they present the cultists, but the book does give advice on this also.

This is an impressive start for a new line of ***d20*** books, with none of the teething errors seen in similar first time releases. What makes ***Akrasia: Thief of Time*** really stand out from the rest are the ideas behind the goddess and their application.

--*Matthew Pook (With thanks to Roj at Wayland's Forge)*

The Temple of the Serpent Queen

An Adventure for the *Exalted* RPG

by Stephen Kenson

The *Exalted* roleplaying game from [White Wolf Games Studio](#) is set in a world of epic fantasy adventure. The players take the roles of the Solar Exalted, champions of the gods, chosen to help save the world. They are faced with many enemies, from the Dragon-Blooded who rule the Realm to strange creatures from the Wyld, the unformed chaos at the edge of Creation. To aid them, they have many magical powers, making them heroes of epic stature.

"The Temple of the Serpent Queen" is an introductory adventure for *Exalted*, involving the peril of a small village and a threat only the power of the Exalted can confront, since it originates with one of their own. The Exalted characters come upon a place plagued by raids from a barbarian tribe from the depths of the Wyld. The source of the raids is one of the Lunar Exalted, exiled from the world for centuries and now bent on revenge. After fending off the raids, the heroes must brave the madness of the Wyld to put an end to the threat once and for all. Players and storytellers should be familiar with the rules and information from the *Exalted* rulebook before playing this adventure. Exalted characters from all Solar Castes are useful in this adventure.

Scene One: Unwelcome Arrival

The adventure assumes the player characters are already acquainted and part of a Circle of Solar Exalted. The Storyteller can play out the first meeting of the characters as part of their Prelude, or just assume they already know each other. Alternately, they might meet for the first time in the village of Naramar, although that will require some adjustment of the events in this scene. Since the forces of Fate often take a hand in the world of *Exalted* it's not that unusual for a group of Solar Exalted to happen to meet in a place where they're most needed.

The characters are traveling through the far reaches of the Threshold (most likely somewhere in the southeast, although the adventure could take place almost anywhere the Storyteller would like). Fatigued from their long journey, they come upon a village that offers the possibility of rest, shelter, warm food, and human company, although they must also be careful about revealing their true nature, since agents of the Realm are everywhere.

The village is called Naramar, a humble collection of buildings clustered around a crossroads, with an inn, a central well, and a town square, along with a number of outlying farms and homesteads. The village has no walls surrounding it, and that's a problem for the inhabitants, since there are some signs of damage to the place. Some of the buildings seem to be in disrepair and astute characters (with an Awareness roll, difficulty +1) notice that the damage suggests the place has been raided fairly recently. If the characters take this as reason to pass Naramar by, you can skip right on to Scene Two, or remind them that they have a duty to do what they can to help others. Characters with a high Compassion Virtue should feel compelled to find out more about what has happened in the village (and characters may be required to fail a Compassion roll to ignore the villagers' plight).

The village inn doesn't have a name, it's just "the inn" to the locals. There are a few folk gathered in the common room when the characters arrive, and they take immediate notice of strangers in their midst. Even the innkeeper, a woman named Orchid, is wary toward them, and her face is heavily lined with worry. The villagers treat the characters with cool courtesy, but they're clearly none too fond of strangers. Any overt displays of weapons or armor make the villagers even more nervous, while displays of Exalted powers frighten them (and most likely cause them to flee).

Assuming the characters don't immediately terrify or provoke the villagers, Orchid sees to their needs, overcharging them a bit and saying "times are hard" if the characters complain about the prices. A successful Socialize roll can convince Orchid to mention that Naramar has suffered from barbarians raids recently. They've fought off two already and they're concerned that another may be coming soon. She says the characters shouldn't linger, if they're smart.

A tall, broad-shouldered villager interrupts Orchid's talk with the characters. If the Exalted seem threatening, he steps forward even sooner. His name is Brill, the town smith, and he demands to know who the characters are and what they're doing in Naramar. He's clearly had a little too much to drink and is spoiling for a fight, since tensions are so high in the town. Orchid tells Brill to back off, but he tries to provoke the characters into a fight with insults and insinuations. How they choose to handle it is up to them, but Brill is just an ordinary (albeit fairly strong) mortal, no match for one of the Solar Exalted. If the characters handle him gracefully, without hurting him too much, they earn some respect from the people of Naramar. If they just kill him, the villagers are more likely to be afraid of them, and less likely to ask the characters for help.

Brill (an extra): Base Initiative: 4, 4 dice in any relevant dice pools, Attack: 4, Damage: 4B, Defense: 4, Soak: 3B, Valor 2, Willpower: 4, Health Levels: -1, -3, Incapacitated.

Typical Villager: Base Initiative: 2, 2 dice in any relevant dice pools, Attack: 2, Damage: 2B, Defense: 2, Soak: 2B, Valor 1, Willpower: 3, Health Levels: -1, -3, Incapacitated.

Scene Two: The Attack

Shortly after the Circle arrives in Naramar, the Wyld barbarians attack the village. The attack can begin at any suitably dramatic moment: while the characters are talking with Orchid, while they're sparring with Brill, or just after they've beaten him. If it looks like one of the character is likely to finish Brill, it may be wise to have the attack happen before the final blow falls (although you can always allow the characters to follow through and suffer the consequences of their actions).

There should be roughly three times the Circle's number in barbarians plus their number in snake men. They are all wearing armor of leather and overlapping bronze scales, carrying spears and axes. Their bodies are entirely hairless, and their exposed skin is tattooed in various mottled patterns of blue, green, and black. Some of them wear masks made to look like various snakes or reptiles. They attack wildly, shouting and hissing, killing and destroying everything in their path. The villagers are trying to mount a defense, but it's clear they're seriously outmatched by the barbarians, who are deliberately toying with their victims, taking their time.

If the characters don't rush outside to see what's going on, several barbarians come crashing through the front door and window of the inn and attack immediately.

Early in the fight one of the barbarians' masks should get knocked or torn off, revealing a smooth, scaly head with snake-like eyes and a fanged mouth with a forked tongue. After their true nature is revealed, the snake men cast aside their masks and also use their bite attacks against the Exalted.

Although the barbarians greatly outnumber the Circle, they're all just extras, and this initial fight should be an opportunity for the Exalted to kick some butt and show off their various Charms and abilities. They will have to put some effort into avoiding the barbarians' attacks, but each of the Exalted's attacks that hit should take down one of their opponents. Encourage the players to make up cool stunts and give them the chance to put their characters through their paces. When more than two-thirds of the barbarians have been incapacitated, the remainder retreat as quickly as they can. The characters can pursue and finish them off or just let them go. If the barbarians prove too much for the Exalted to handle, you can have some of the villagers join in the battle on the Exalted's side, but they shouldn't need any help.

Wyld Barbarians (extras): Base Initiative: 5, all relevant combat dice pools 5, Attack: 5 (spear or axe), Damage: 5L, Defense: 5, Soak: 5B/2L, Valor 3, Willpower 5, Health Levels: -1, -3, Incapacitated.

Snake Men (extras): Base Initiative: 5, all relevant combat dice pools 5. Attack: 5 (weapon or bite), Damage: 5L or 4L bite plus poison (roll Stamina + Resistance, difficulty 2, success: 1L damage, failure: 4L damage, -2 penalty for 4 hours), Defense: 5, Soak: 5B/3L, Valor 3, Willpower 5, Health Levels: -1, -3, Incapacitated.

Scene Three: A Call for Help

If the Exalted drive off the barbarian raiders, they'll be regarded as heroes in Naramar. If they were restrained and civil in Scene One, the villagers treat them like royalty. If they were harsh or frightened the locals, then they're treated more like angry and capricious gods, with villagers fawning over them and begging for their mercy for not recognizing their greatness when they first appeared. Now is a great time to give the players some ego-stroking or show up some of their mistakes in Scene One, if they made any, through the villagers' reactions.

They quickly meet Kano, the older headman of Naramar, who thanks them profusely and asks them to be his guests. A feast is quickly prepared in the characters' honor and during the festivities, Kano asks the Exalted if they will help to rid Naramar of the barbarian raiders once and for all. If the characters seem reluctant, the villagers will offer them whatever they can, although it's clear they don't have much in the way of material wealth. If they seem willing, Kano tells them that the barbarians come out of the Wyld no more than a day's travel from Naramar. There are stories of ancient ruins in the Wyld lands there, part of a temple or the like from the First Age, but lost to the sight of man for centuries by the encroachment of the Wyld on the world. No mere mortals could venture into the Wyld and return, but then the Exalted are not mere mortals, are they?

Play out the interactions with the villagers for as long as they're interesting and give the players the opportunity to bask in the glory of their deeds before they set off again. If the players seem reluctant to help the villagers, the people of Naramar will weep and plead with them. If they are so hard-hearted as to ignore such desperate pleas (and they all manage to fail the necessary Compassion rolls), let them go on their way, only to hear how Naramar was destroyed only a day or two after they left, with all of its people slaughtered. Perhaps the Circle can do a better job protecting the *next* village the barbarians threaten.

Scene Four: Taking Action

How this scene unfolds depends on what the Circle decides to do next. They may choose to stay in Naramar, gathering information and making preparations or they may set out immediately for the Wyld lands and the ruins that Kano told them about.

If the Circle stays in Naramar, they can help train the village's small militia, fortify the village, and prepare other defenses against future attacks. The barbarians attack again in a day or two, with at least as many as in the first attack (more, if you felt the first combat proved too easy for the Exalted). Snake men assassins may also try and attack the player characters in a vulnerable moment (say, sneaking into their rooms while they are asleep) in order to remove Naramar's newfound protectors. Eventually, it should become clear that the Exalted have to take the battle to the barbarians if they want to ensure that the attacks will stop.

If the characters head off to the Wyld lands, the villagers offer them whatever supplies they can. The day or so it takes to reach the edge of the Wyld lands is a good opportunity for another encounter, if the Storyteller wants. Perhaps some barbarians come across the characters, or they meet up with some strange creature from the Wyld. A local spirit may cause trouble for the Circle along their way. See the **Antagonists** chapter of **Exalted** for ideas regarding additional encounters.

Scene Five: Into the Wyld

The Circle must travel for over a day through the thick woods and jungle to find the lair of the serpent barbarians. The Storyteller can require Survival rolls to follow the tracks through the heavy jungle undergrowth, but it's not difficult, since the barbarians have made no effort to conceal signs of their passage.

The jungle is alive with all manner of creatures, mostly snakes and various reptiles, along with monkeys, a profusion of birds, insects, and even some great cats. The Circle may have to deal with poisonous snakes in the underbrush or a mischievous monkey stealing something from them and scampering away. There may also be jungle spirits abroad, if the Storyteller wants the Circle to encounter one. Perhaps the mischievous monkey is more than it appears.

The further the heroes travel, the stranger the jungle becomes. They are walking into an area influenced by the Wyld, and everything that lives here is tainted by its chaos. The plants gradually become different colors and shapes, some of them growing suspended in midair, others throwing off clouds of sparkling, sweet pollen (which may be poisonous or cause hallucinations). Some plants have sharp, razor-edged leaves as hard as bronze (which the Exalted may recognize as the tips of some barbarian weapons) and grow fruits and flowers of metallic colors.

The jungle creatures are also affected by the Wyld energies. Snakes may have multiple heads, capable of spitting acidic venom, or shining scales that can mesmerize their prey. Apes may have multiple limbs or lizard-like heads with fanged jaws while tigers may have the power to melt into mist, blend with the jungle foliage, or grow to truly fearsome size. Consult the **Antagonists** chapter of **Exalted** for ideas of Wyld mutations to add to the jungle beasts, but give the Circle a fair chance to avoid danger using their Abilities and Charms.

Other events Storytellers can throw into the scene to stress the alien strangeness of the Wyld include:

- Visions and hallucinations, particularly relating to important people and events from the characters' pasts. This offers an opportunity for some character development and showing off some of the characters' Preludes to the group. If you haven't run a Prelude with the players, now is a good opportunity to allow them to flesh out their characters a bit more.
- Wooden or plant items carried by the characters may begin to sprout leaves or even flowers while leather and sinew items may begin to drip blood in a most disturbing fashion. A sword can transform into a metallic serpent that slithers away into the underbrush, while a thrown dagger might take root and become a strange, silvery flower with steel-hard petals that shoots needle-like darts. Take care not to deprive the Exalted of too much of their equipment, since it might make the following scenes too difficult.
- The characters' eye, hair, or skin color may begin to change, the first signs of a Wyld pox. The effect is temporary (unless they Circle spends many more days in the Wyld area), but the players shouldn't necessarily know that.
- The characters hear strange sounds or voices, they feel phantom touches brush against them, and even smell exotic scents or taste flavors in the air as the Wyld assaults their senses.

Scene Six: The Chasm of Mists

After traveling for over a day through the jungle, the Circle reaches the edge of a great chasm, spanned by a narrow rope bridge. The chasm is about forty feet across and filled with thick, roiling mists. It stretches out to either side for quite some distance; it would take the characters a while to try and find another place to cross it (although if they want to, let them try). On the far side of the chasm stands an ancient ruin like Kano told them about back in Naramar. It is a walled compound around a crumbling step-pyramid, the whole of it covered in vines and mosses. Lights flicker from within the walls and a strange sort of hissing chant echoes through the courtyard.

Let the players decide how they want to get across the chasm (charms like Monkey Leap Technique allow them to actually jump across). Crossing the rope bridge doesn't require a roll, and it can support all of the characters at once, although it sways considerably (feel free to roll some dice when the Circle crosses the bridge, just to make the players worry). When the Circle (individually or as a group) is about half way across the chasm, a massive, scaly head at the end of a long, sinuous neck, rises up out of the mists with a terrible roar!

It is a mist serpent, a creature of the Wyld charged by the Serpent Queen with protecting the ruin, and it attacks the Exalted immediately. It begins by breathing a cloud of noxious gas that can engulf an area two yards across. Its attacks may also damage the rope bridge, forcing the Exalted to make Dexterity + Athletics rolls to avoid falling into the chasm. A fall does 12L damage and armor soak does not protect against it. The serpent can only use its breath attack every third combat turn, it tries to bite the rest of the time.

Mist Serpent: Base Initiative: 6, Strength 14, Dexterity 3, Stamina 12, Attack: 9, Damage: 14L, Noxious Breath: Attack: 8, Damage: Poison (difficulty 2, 1L/5L, -2 penalty), Soak: 12B/6L, Health Levels: -0, -0, -0, -1, -1, -1, -1, -2, -2, -2, -2, -4, -4, Incap.

Three combat rounds after the mist serpent attacks, characters who make a Perception + Awareness roll can see barbarians manning the walls of the ruin. Ten barbarians begin hurling javelins at the heroes (Attack: 5, Damage: 5L), but they're at +1 difficulty to hit due to the range. The flying javelins should complicate the fight with the serpent a bit and add some excitement.

Scene Seven: The Queen of Serpents

Getting inside the walls surrounding the ruin isn't easy; they're manned by barbarians with javelins and spears and the heavy stone walls are almost twenty feet high, with a stout (recently added) wooden gate on the side facing the chasm. Treat the gate as having a Soak of 5B/5L and eight health levels before it breaks. The stone walls have 12B/12L soak and ten health levels. Reducing either to zero health levels smashes it. Alternately, a massive feat of strength (Strength + Athletics roll, difficulty 6) can force the gate open.

Within are twice the Circle's number in barbarians and their number in snake men (minus any they might have slain on their way in). There is a raised altar at the top of the step pyramid with two of the snake men flanking it and an almost nude woman sprawled out across it. The barbarians immediately attack the Circle, fighting fiercely to defend their sacred temple.

The woman atop the altar is not what she appears. As soon as one of the Exalted tries to "rescue" her, or the fight turns against the barbarians, she rises up and tears off her skin like dry paper, revealing dark, scaled flesh underneath. Her legs burst out into long serpentine coils and she retrieves her weapons from where they are hidden behind the altar. She is Maha-Nagah, the Serpent Queen, one of the Lunar Exalted and the leader of the barbarian tribe. She either attacks her "rescuer" from surprise (most likely using her poisonous bite) or rallies her troops and leads a renewed attack against the Exalted.

Wyld Barbarians (extras): Base Initiative: 5, all relevant combat dice pools 5, Attack: 5 (spear or axe), Damage: 5L, Defense: 5, Soak: 5B/2L, Valor 3, Willpower 5, Health Levels: -1, -3, Incapacitated.

Snake Men (extras): Base Initiative: 5, all relevant combat dice pools 5. Attack: 5 (weapon or bite), Damage: 5L or 4L bite plus poison (roll Stamina + Resistance, difficulty 2, success: 1L damage, failure: 4L damage, -2 penalty for 4 hours), Defense: 5, Soak: 5B/3L, Valor 3, Willpower 5, Health Levels: -1, -3, Incapacitated.

Maha-Nagah, Queen of Serpents (Lunar Exalted)

Caste: Changing Moon

Nature: Judge

Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 5, Stamina 4, Charisma 2, Manipulation 2, Appearance 4, Perception 4, Intelligence 3, Wits 3

Abilities: Archery 3 (Game +2), Awareness 3, Bureaucracy 2, Craft (Carving) 3, Dodge 4, Endurance 5, Lore 5, Martial Arts 4, Medicine 2 (Herbal Remedies), Melee 3 (Swords +1), Performance 3, Presence 4, Resistance 4, Ride 1, Socialize 3 (Seduction +2), Stealth 2, Survival 3 (Wyld +1)

Virtues: Compassion 2, Conviction 4, Temperance 2, Valor 3

Backgrounds: Allies 1, Backing 4, Followers 5, Manse 4, Resources 3

Charms: Maha-Nagah has Dexterity charms that allow her to add dice to her Archery and Martial Arts attacks, at a cost of 1 mote per die (no more than doubler her normal dice pool), and a reflexive Strength charm that increases the damage of her attacks (at a cost of 1 mote per die). She can increase her initiative by up to +5 by spending Essence (1 mote per +1). For 10 motes she can "shed her skin" and transform into any human appearance or into a large snake (with a snake's Physical Attributes). This lasts until she spends Peripheral Essence.

For 10 motes and 1 Willpower she can "shed her skin" (ripping it off) and assume the form of a scaly creature with the lower body of a snake and the upper body of a woman. In this form she gains +2 to all of her Physical Attributes, double her normal soak values, a bite attack, plus her punches do lethal damage and she can grapple a character with her tail while still taking other actions.

Base Initiative: 8 (10 in snake-woman form)

Attacks: (*snake-woman form only)

*Bite: Speed +3, Attack 12, Damage 6L plus poison difficulty 3, 2L/6L, -2 penalty, Defense 0

Punch: Speed 0, Attack 9 (11), Damage 4B (6L), Defense 9 (11)

*Grapple: Speed -1, Attack 10, Damage 8B. The grappled character can choose to inflict Strength +2 damage on Maha-Nagah or try to break free by rolling Dexterity + Martial Arts or Brawl.

Sword: Speed +3, Attack 10 (12), Damage: 6L (8L), Defense: 10 (12)

Bow: Attack: 8 (10), Damage: 6L plus poison difficulty 2, 11/4L, -2 penalty. Note that bow damage does not increase when Maha-Nagah changes form.

Dodge Pool: 9/11, **Soak:** 4B/2L (6B/3L, 12B/6L)

Willpower: 7, **Health Levels:** -0/-1/-1/-1/-1/-1/-1/-2/-2/-2/-2/-2/-2/-4/Incap

Essence: 5, **Personal Essence:** 19, **Peripheral Essence:** 50

Maha-Nagah has lived in exile in the Wyld for a very long time and her sanity is all but gone. She lives for the opportunity for vengeance against the world that wronged her, and the presence of the Solar Exalted only feeds her cold rage. She can't be bargained with unless her enemies clearly have the upper hand, and even then she is treacherous and sly. She'll try to escape if and when it's clear that the Exalted have her outmatched, but she's a powerful adversary with many charms and abilities at her disposal, and she's not inclined to give up easily. She considers the barbarians her children (in fact, many of them are) and they will gladly fight to the death for her.

Epilogue

Once the heroes have defeated or driven off Maha-Nagah and her barbarian followers, they can explore the ruins and find some of the treasures the Serpent Queen gathered there: enough gold, silver, and jade (mostly First Age coins and jewelry) sufficient to maintain the characters as if they were all Resources 3 for six months (with enough left over to make a princely gift to the village of Naramar, if they wish), plus any wonders the Storyteller may wish to include for the characters (see Chapter Nine of **Exalted** for details). At the least a few charms and talismans should be present (like a good luck charm or walkaway). An orichalcum or moonsilver hearthstone amulet is also a possibility.

The Circle's journey back to Naramar should be fairly uneventful (the Storyteller may choose to have it happen "off stage" and just segue back to the village). Of course, it can be run as an additional short adventure, especially if the Exalted become lost in the Wyld (see below). Their return to the village is greeted with great jubilation and the people of Naramar offer the Exalted their profound thanks for their aid. The characters have the opportunity to counter some of the notions about the Solar Exalted put about by the Dragon-Blooded and the Immaculate Order, and they can be sure that tales of their deeds will spread to the ears of anyone who reaches this part of the world.

Further Adventures

The events in this adventure can lead into future adventures if used as part of an ongoing **Exalted** chronicle:

- The Circle may find it more difficult to leave the Wyld than it was to enter. Time and space often behave strangely on the edges of Creation, so the Exalted might leave the ruined temple and become lost in the jungle, only to reemerge some distance away from where they entered, perhaps even on the other side of the world or in some other Wyld domain claimed by one of the Lunar Exalted or the Fair Folk.
- The ruins inhabited by the Serpent Queen and her followers may be as extensive as the Storyteller wishes, and may hold many secrets of the First Age. The Circle could spend another adventure (or more) exploring the depths of the ruins. Perhaps the Serpent Queen was guarding something like the tomb of a Solar from the First Age (maybe even a previous incarnation of one of the characters!). Such a tomb would be protected by elaborate traps and guardian demons intended to keep the reborn Solars from ever reaching it.
- If Maha-Nagah survived her encounter with the Circle, she swears vengeance against them and eventually gathers new followers to strike at them. If she was slain, then she may have a brother or sister Lunar Exalted who finds out about her death and takes up the cause of avenging her, causing trouble for the Circle in the future.
- Once word of their deeds spreads, the Circle may find themselves beset with pleas for aid and assistance from

people dealing with barbarian raids, the Fair Folk, hostile spirits, and other dangers. Plus the Dragon-Blooded may heard about the heroes' deeds and send agents of the Wyld Hunt to search for them.

Using *Temple of the Serpent Queen* with *Dungeons & Dragons*

It's a fairly simple matter to adapt **Temple of the Serpent Queen** for use with *Dungeons & Dragons, Third Edition*. The adventure is suitable for a party of 7th level characters, since they're supposed to be more capable than most of their opponents, except for the Serpent Queen. Unless the Dungeon Master is also using the *Exalted* setting, ignore the references to the Exalted; Maha-Nagah is just an intelligent monster, like a demon or some sort of were-creature. Likewise ignore references to the Wyld; the ruined temple lies in an isolated area believed to be cursed, perhaps subject to some wild magic (for those using the *Forgotten Realms* campaign setting).

Wyld Barbarians: Medium humanoid (6 ft. tall); HD 1d8; hp 8; Init +0; Spd 30 ft.; AC 13 (+3 studded leather armor); Atk +2 melee (1d8, battleaxe or shortspear) or +1 ranged (1d6, javelin); AL CE; SV Fort +1, Ref +1, Will +0; Str 13, Dex 10, Con 11, Int 8, Wis 9, Cha 9.

Skills and Feats: Balance +2, Jump +4, Wilderness Lore +4. Power Attack.

Possessions: Battleaxe or shortspear, 4 javelins, studded leather armor.

Snake Men: Medium humanoid (reptilian) (6 ft. tall); HD 2d8; hp 10; Init +0; Spd 30 ft.; AC 18 (+5 natural, +3 studded leather armor); Atk +2 melee (1d4+1, claws), +1 ranged (1d6+1 javelin); SA poison; AL NE; SV Fort +1, Ref +3, Will +0; Str 13, Dex 10, Con 13, Int 9, Wis 10, Cha 10.

Skills and Feats: Balance +4, Jump +4, Multiattack.

Special Abilities: **Poison (Ex):** Bite, Fortitude save (DC 11); initial and secondary damage 1d6 temporary Constitution.

Possessions: Battleaxe or shortspear, 4 javelins, studded leather armor.

Mist Serpent: Large magical beast (reptilian); HD 9d10+27; hp 75; Init +6 (+2 Dex, +4 Improved Initiative); Spd 40 ft.; AC 18 (-1 size, +2 Dex, +7 natural); Atk +12 melee (bite, 2d6+4); SA poison breath; AL N; SV Fort +9, Ref +8, Will +4; Str 19, Dex 15, Con 17, Int 6, Wis 11, Cha 11.

Skills and Feats: Listen +10, Spot +10, Improved Initiative, Power Attack.

Special Abilities: **Poison (Ex):** Bite, Fortitude save (DC 15); initial and secondary damage 1d6 temporary Constitution.

Maha-Nagah: Large humanoid (reptilian) (30 ft. long); HD 9d8+18; hp 64; Init +8 (+4 Dex, +4 Improved Initiative); Spd 40 ft.; AC 23 (-1 size, +4 Dex, +10 natural); Atk +10 melee (1d8+2, longsword), +10 melee (1d6+2 plus poison, bite), +10 melee (tail strike, 3d6+2), +12 ranged (1d6 plus poison, bow); Face/Reach 5 ft. x 5 ft./10 ft.; SA constrict, feats, spell-like abilities, poison; AL NE; SV Fort +#, Ref +#, Will +#; Str 16, Dex 20, Con 15, Int 13, Wis 15, Cha 13.

Skills and Feats: Animal Empathy +5, Balance +6, Climb +8, Concentration +6, Handle Animal +6, Hide +8, Intimidate +8, Listen +6, Move Silently +9, Spot +8; Cleave, Great Cleave, Improved Initiative, Point Blank Shot, Power Attack, Precise Shot, Quick Draw.

Special Abilities: **Improved Grab (Ex):** If Maha-Nagah strikes an opponent with her tail she can constrict them.

Constrict (Ex): Maha-Nagah deals 3d6+2 damage with a successful grapple check against Medium-size or smaller creatures. The constricted creature must succeed at a Fortitude save (DC 19) or lose consciousness for as long as it remains in her coils and for 2d4 rounds thereafter. **Poison (Ex):** Bite, Fortitude save (DC 19) initial and secondary damage 1d8 temporary Constitution. **Spell-like Abilities:** *bull's strength, cat's grace, change self* (into human-like form) up to three times per day as a 10th level sorcerer.

Possessions: Masterwork longsword, masterwork longbow and quiver of 20 arrows.

Using *Temple of the Serpent Queen* with other RPGs

This adventure adapts fairly easily to most other fantasy roleplaying games. For *GURPS Fantasy* campaigns, the Serpent Queen's temple may lie on one of the Ring Islands or along the border of the Great Forest and the Great Desert. Some of her followers may be reptile men. For Asian fantasy RPGs like *Legends of the Five Rings* and *Sengoku*, the Serpent Queen may be a powerful naga, spirit, or similar creature threatening a village on the outskirts of the civilized world. With some modifications, the adventure is even usable with the *Deadlands* "weird west" RPG.

Make Maha-Nagah and her followers corrupt Indians living in an isolated desert canyon and threatening nearby towns, more like rattlers than vipers. A posse can be just as surprised when the sweet young thing they thought they was rescuin' turns out to be the boss of all the one's they's fightin'. The same modifications would allow the adventure to work for the wild west of the *Castle Falkenstein* world.

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Murphy's Rules



by John Kovalic

Murphy's Rules



Murphy's Rules



Won't You Have a Brownie?

Brownies: A Fun New Fantasy Race For *GURPS*

by Andrew J. Shelden

Since time immemorial people have seen little folk in their homes and in the woods: Gnomes, Leprechauns, and more. In the misty hills of Scotland there dwelt the Brownie. Small and quick, sometimes hairy, sometimes brown, always helpful, Brownies were found in the homes and barns of Scottish farmsteads. They would come out at night and tidy up, helping with chores and so on. But if the humans dared criticize their work, they would make nasty mischief, like destroying crops, making livestock ill, or fouling food stores. Legends hold that Brownies are a happy folk, cheerful and helpful, and that they love children. They love to play with kids, tell them stories, and teach them to make garlands of wildflowers. The only gifts they would accept would be gifts of food and ale (as they would sometimes help with any brewing going on nearby). It would never do for a human to pay undue attention to his Brownie helper, or give gifts other than edibles, because the Brownie might take offense. An offended Brownie might just abandon his human neighbors, or might bring down the wrath of the Faerie folk on the offending humans and their livestock, but they would never harm a child, nor allow one to come to harm at the hands of a human. What happens when a ticked-off Brownie moves out of his farm-home? He goes to the woods.

During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, like all of the Wee folk, Brownie legends were sanitized and romanticized, with the initial insult being Palmer Cox's *The Brownies* (first published in the magazine "St. Nicholas" in 1883, the art of the pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, including Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Edward Burne-Jones, and finally culminating in the 1930s with the book *Jolly Old Santa Claus* written by somebody known only as "Sparky," complete with whimsical paintings of Santa Claus and his merry goof-offs, the Brownies, by painter George Heinke. Much of their nature has been "cleaned up" to make them less frightening to (human) children. These were further sanitized in a recent reprint, but that's a different matter altogether.

Brownies are tiny humanoids of an extremely magical nature. They are capricious and playful, and always ready to party. Brownies can be a blast to play, and make intriguing NPCs. Like Leprechauns and other "faerie folk," Brownies are prone to playing practical jokes, some of which can be extremely destructive -- even deadly -- without actual malicious intent . . . which could make a forest -- or even a farm -- full of Brownies a dangerous obstacle for the unwary.

To determine height, take the normal for ST (after racial modifiers, double it and read feet for inches. They can be of any build found in humanity, but due to their small size, weight is negligible -- 6-10 pounds. Brownie hair is wiry and unmanageable in many cases. It can be blond, brunette or red, with brown being the norm. Many Brownie males wear full beards. Their hair and beards usually turn white or silver in their advanced years. Baldness is not uncommon among the older males. Traditionally, males and females wear their hair long -- shoulder length or more for the men and sometimes down to the floor for women. Their eyes are usually brown or blue.

Brownie dress is usually flannel shirts of white, red or green, brown trousers held up with suspenders and soft leather shoes in Elven styles. Particularly in colder areas, Brownies are frequently seen in long stocking-caps which match their shirts. Brownie women dress in similar fashion to their men, with the primary differences being long skirts rather than trousers and close-fitting knit caps. Since they mostly live in colder climes, Brownies generally keep their heads covered when outside.

Advantages and Disadvantages

Brownies have ST -4 (-30 points), DX +2 (20 points) and IQ +2 (20 points). They have the advantages Longevity (5 points) and Magical Aptitude (15 points). Brownie disadvantages are Decreased Hit Points -2 (-10 points), Inconvenient Size (-15 points) and Compulsive Behavior/Tidying (-10) All Brownies have a Racially Learned Skill in

any craft -- e.g. Woodworking, Clock making, Sewing, Brewing, etc. -- at IQ +2 (6 points), and have the Racial Skill Bonus +1 for Engineering or Design skills (4 points). All Brownies have the Quirks Fond of Children (-1) and Practical Joker (-1).

It costs 2 points to play a Brownie.

In addition, any Brownie may take up to two spells as though they were racially innate, provided that they are not Mental/Very Hard spells, they do not require Magery 2 or 3, and no spell has a higher energy cost than 3. As with any innate spells, the GM may declare any spell or group of spells "off limits," for either the entire race of Brownies or for an individual in order to protect the balance of the campaign.

These spells are bought at skill level 13 or the Brownie's IQ, whichever is higher. Brownies are not required to have spells, but if spells are not purchased at initial character generation, they cannot be added later. All other rules of racially innate spells apply.

Brownies are a merry folk, far more out-going than their reticent cousins, the Leprechauns. They are, as a race, hard workers and hard players. They work at their tidying (or, in the woods, their craft -- generally toy making or gadget designing) for hours on end, then party hard until they drop.

Brownies are sort of reverse Gremlins in that they are magical beings which are benefactors of technology unless crossed, in which case they can be very destructive to machinery). This magic-technology paradox cannot be explained except by saying that Brownies love tinkering with and designing gadgets. Their spells often lean toward assisting in this tinkering. They tend not to enchant their creations; but carvers might have Shape Wood, for example.

Brownies are not by nature gifted merchants. They will sell their wares to any one who passes by and offers money, but are just as frequently known to simply give their creations away, particularly to children of any race. "Big Folk" who live near Brownie lands often venture into the woods specifically to see if they can find a Brownie and receive a gift. Many give baskets of bread, cheese, ale and meats to leave. Humans living near Brownie lands have been known to leave gifts of food near the edge of the forest in the evening and return the next day to find a toy for their child, or a set of hand-crafted wooden bowls, a new broom or some other helpful household items. Because of this, Brownies rarely have need to hunt or seek out food of any sort. Most humans in near Brownie lands know not to overdo with gifts of food and ale, lest they lose their helpers.

Despite their deeply magical nature, Brownies rarely actually study magic, and Brownie wizards are extremely rare. Like Leprechauns, Brownies are frequently born knowing some small spells and have them mastered before they reach puberty. They can learn spells later in the usual manner, but they are generally uninterested in doing so. If asked, a Brownie will share his magical knowledge with another Brownie, but they are usually unwilling to give up time from either their work or play, so asking is infrequent. Work *is* play to the Brownie, who takes great pride in his accomplishments. No human has anything bad to say about the Brownie's work (even if he thinks the Brownie won't hear) because the consequences of such criticism can be trivial (broken eggs) devastating (lost crops, sick cattle or chickens), and even deadly (sabotaged plowing or other equipment) depending on the severity of the insult.

Brownies are peaceful and generally non-violent. They abhor war, but are not willing to be over-run. They will defend themselves, their families and homes, and any innocent -- particularly children -- against attack. Their weapons are tiny versions of the missile weapons found among the "Big Folk" in their given Tech Level. They do not envenom their weapons except with paralytic or narcotic agents. Brownie combat is a sight to behold; they rarely show themselves, preferring to fire their weapons from ingeniously concealed bunkers in trees, rocks, and hillsides. Brownies generally welcome any race into their homeland with open arms but Orcs, Goblins, Minotaurs, Ogres and Trolls are not tolerated and will be driven off if the Brownies can manage it.

Brownies work in any medium; their skills and spells generally focus on one type of craft, giving Brownie creations exceptional quality and durability. They have no art except their work, which can be of great beauty and frequently of great function.

Brownies love music and dancing. Unfortunately, they do not tend to be skilled musicians. They turn to their cousins,

the Leprechauns, and other sylvan folk for their music, often dancing the night away in the presence of Fauns who might live nearby.

Brownie names are often based on Elvish naming practices found in their region, sometimes taking names symbolic of their work on a particular farm. (No self respecting Brownie would call himself, say, Sparky unless he lived in a smithy . . . and probably not even then.)

Most Brownies learn to read and write. They don't keep extensive historical records, however, and they don't generally read or invent stories. Their desire for literacy seems to stem from the need to take notes on their tinkering so they can resume in the morning where they left off the night before, regardless of the magnitude of their hang-overs.

Brownie religion is a form of Mana/Nature Worship. They do not seem to have a named god per se, but rather appear to hold mana in high reverence. There are no known Brownie priests; each individual communes directly with their god.

Ecology

"Domestic" Brownies can be found in virtually any cool, moist clime where there are farmers and children. A woodland people, "Wild" Brownies can be found in virtually any forest. They do, however, prefer cooler climes and mountain terrain, where ancient oaks, evergreen trees and winter snows abound. Brownies have no idea from whence they came. The suggestions that apply to Leprechauns are valid here as well: some think Brownies are the result of a cross between Halflings and Faerie Folk, but Brownies, like Leprechauns, have been known for millennia before anyone even knew what a Halfling was.

Brownie diet is rather similar to the tastes found in whatever Big Folk live in their region, largely due to the fact that the Big Folk bring food to exchange for crafts. Brownies do not generally hunt or farm, nor do they tend flocks (except the "Domestic" Brownies who help with their human's chickens, sheep, or cattle.)

Brownies are very family oriented, and most have a strong Sense of Duty to their families. It is easy to see why. Brownie couples mate for life, and generally only produce two or three children during their 30-40 year reproductive years. Children are the greatest treasures of the Brownies, and many a Brownie has fallen protecting children -- regardless of race. Brownies reach adolescence at 18 and are considered adult at 30. They begin aging around their 65th year, but do so far more slowly than humans. Most are active well into their second century and the average life expectancy is around 220.

Culture

"Domestic" Brownies live in abandoned rat holes or in the hay lofts of barns. "Wild" Brownies build their forest homes into whatever natural shelter is available. It is not uncommon to see a Brownie's front door over a knot-hole in a hollow tree or atop an abandoned fox borrow. Inside, the homes are tidy and quaint echoes of rustic human or Elven dwellings. Occasionally an eccentric Brownie will build a miniature castle, complete with tiny hewn stone blocks, a working drawbridge and four- or five-foot towers. These castles are rarely designed for defensive purposes, but are rather the expression of the builder's innate stone and masonry skills and spells.

The community unit in Brownie culture is the tribe. They have no leaders, and what little rule making goes on is decided by tribal consent. Brownies tend to be too busy for such trivial things as governing. They prefer to tinker and leave the ruling to the Elves or other sylvan authority-types. They don't require a lot of governing, however, and participate only to the extent of sending gadgets or other creations to the liege lord as tribute. They are, as a people, almost useless on a battle-field, owing to their small size, but some are employed as perimeter guards or forest sentinels.

Brownies who misbehave are dealt with by the entire community. Criminal behavior is not tolerated, and wrongdoers are usually banished to a low- or no-mana area for periods not exceeding two years. Only the most serious offenders

are sent to the local Big Folk lord, and in those cases the Brownies accept whatever fate is assigned to them by their ruler.

Brownies have a well-developed sense of community and family. In the woods, their homes are frequently clustered in tiny "neighborhoods" of six or eight families, with each neighborhood occupying about an acre. Brownies tend to like virgin forests; there are no known Brownie cities.

There are two festivals annually which require the presence of all Brownies in any given forest: Midsummer's Eve, when they gather at the "faerie mounds" to party with Leprechauns and the Faerie Folk 'til sun-up, and the Winter Solstice. The Brownies call the latter the "Festival of the Bonfire," and, as the name implies, they light numerous massive piles of wood in snow-covered clearings. Leprechauns and Fauns are invited to this winter party, as are other sylvan folk, but one usually will find only Fauns and an occasional Elf or Ellyl cavorting with the Brownies in the cold night air.

"Domestic" and "Wild" Brownies are generally too busy with their tinkering to go gallivanting about outside their farms or sylvan woods, but on rare occasions one might venture out -- to visit a favorite or ill child of the Big Folk, or even to explore the world. Explorers are rarely seen again in the Brownie community. The reasons for this are unknown, and the return of a wayward Brownie is cause for a week-long celebration for the entire tribe. The Brownies that do venture out soon find that they can either be heroes or stepped upon by the Big Folk, and usually wind up standing up for the innocent in some far-off land.

Brownie women generally remain in their homes, working on their crafts and tending the next generation of Brownies. Big Folk who actually see Brownie women outside the confines of their farmhouses or sylvan woods are one in a million.

Politics

Brownies are among the more friendly of the sylvan races, but tend to stay put. When they meet others, it is usually the others who come to the Brownies, and the Brownies cheerfully welcome most with open arms. They get along well with Dwarves and Gnomes, and of course, all the sylvan peoples are welcome in Brownie lands. Halflings often venture into the woods with gifts of food to exchange for crafts and wind up partying the night away with the Brownies. The coarser races, Goblins, Kobolds and Gargoyles, are objects of distrust and the Brownies will generally hide from them or torment them into leaving. This frustrates Goblins greatly, for they would love to have mercantile access to the wonderful gadgets of the Brownies. Brownies enjoy humans as individuals, but prefer not to have them settle in the woods. Brownies believe that when one human comes, the rest cannot be far behind. Orcs, Minotaurs, Ogres and Trolls are the only true enemies of the Brownies, but contact is mercifully rare.

They're quirky, they're lively, they're fun. For an added element of whimsy, try a Brownie for your next fantasy adventure -- as a sniper or a scout or comic relief. As a GM, you could pepper your woodland campaign with mischievous Brownies to hinder or help your players. And to keep the campaign all neat and tidy

Sir Thomas More

"A Man for All Seasons"

by C. J. Beiting

Total Points: 190

Born 1477; died 1535

Age 49; 5'6"; c.150 lbs; average size and build; An attractive, charismatic middle-aged Englishman with thin lips, a prominent nose, dark hair with auburn highlights, blue-gray eyes, and a right shoulder somewhat higher than the left.

ST: 10 [-] **DX:** 10 [-] **IQ:** 16 [80] **HT:** 12 [20]

Move: 5 Speed: 5.5

Dodge: 5 Parry: 4 Block: 3

Advantages: Appearance (Attractive) [5], Charisma-2 [10], Common Sense [10], Good Reputation (Good man/honest lawyer; all of England) [5], Good Reputation (Humanist/author of Utopia; all of Europe) [5], Less Sleep-2 [6], Literacy [10], Patron (King Henry VIII) [45], Pious [5], Status-2 [10], Strong Will-1 [4], Wealth (Wealthy) [20].

Disadvantages: Compulsive Generosity [-5], Congenial [-1], Dependant (Servant, 26-50 points, almost all the time) [-18], Dependant Group (Family, fairly often) [-20], Disciplines of Faith (Ritualism/Minor Asceticism) [-5], Duty (King, almost all the time, no risk of life) [-10], Intolerance (Religious)-2 [-10], Sense of Duty (Family) [-5], Sense of Duty (The Established Order) [-15], Vow (Chastity) [-5].

Quirks Can make anybody laugh, even if they don't want to; Many typical catchphrases: "As I was saying", "I assure you", "Then I will show my poor mind to you", etc.; Dislikes dicing and card games; Excellent speaker, but terrible singer; Keen believer in women's education. [-5]

Skills Accounting-15 [2], Administration-18 [6], Animal Handling-13 [1/2], Area Knowledge (London)-15 [1/2], Astronomy-13 [1/2], Bard-18 [4], Bow-8 [1], Carousing-12 [1 1/2], Criminology-14 [1/2], Diplomacy-16 [4], History-15 [2], Interrogation-16 [2], Law-18 [8], Literature-13 [1/2], Mathematics-13 [1/2], Musical Instrument (Lute)-13 [1/2], Performance-15 [1], Philosophy-13 [1/2], Poetry-16 [2], Politics-16 [2], Riding-10 [Default], Savoir-Faire-18 [Default], Servant-16 [Default], Singing-8 [Default], Streetwise-11 [Default], Teaching-14 [1/2], Theology-14 [1], Writing-17 [4].

Languages English (native)-17 [2], Greek-15 [1], Latin-17 [4], *Law French-16 [2]

*Law French is a kind of pidgin French used in English law courts.

Equipment: Sir Thomas More has little characteristic equipment, except perhaps for the pens and papers which mark the professional scholar and administrator. He bears the signet seal for the kingdom of England, and in time will wear the golden S-chain of office. His clothing is fine but simple: he dresses nicely only because fine dress is expected of someone in his position, and he is otherwise somewhat careless of his appearance. Unbeknownst to everyone, underneath his finery he has worn a hair shirt since age 18, and his skin is irritated and lacerated because of it. He will almost always be encountered with a silent retainer: either his secretary, John Harris, or his manservant, John à Wood.

* * *

This portrait represents Thomas More circa 1526, when he is near the height of his career. He is an excellent lawyer, orator, administrator, and diplomat. He is in the service of King Henry VIII, and has been knighted five years

previously. He holds a number of important administrative posts: functionally, he controls access to the King. His book *Utopia* has made him famous throughout Europe, and he enjoys a special reputation amongst the citizenry of London. He is popular, witty, celebrated; loved by the King and at home in the social whirl of a courtier's life. More has just moved his large household into a beautiful new home in Chelsea, and seems to have all that a man could wish for. His only sadness is the fact that he is almost constantly travelling about in the presence of the King, which does not leave him as much time with his family as he would like. He is also concerned about the radical ideas of a German monk named Martin Luther . . .

Note that the above portrait does not include any Contact advantages. More knew so many people that this is impossible to simulate in *GURPS* terms: the GM should assume that More can get in touch with anyone he pleases.

Biography

Sir Thomas More offers a study in contrasts and cultivated ambiguity, much like a Renaissance masque. He was a Londoner born and bred, and apart from a few brief diplomatic trips to France and the Low Countries, never left England. He was born on February 7, 1477, the eldest son of John More, a lawyer who would later be knighted and serve as a judge on the King's Bench. The young Thomas received one of the finest educations money could buy, and served as a page in the household of John Morton, archbishop of Canterbury, chancellor of England, and future cardinal. Even in such illustrious surroundings he distinguished himself by his wit and intelligence. At age 14 he went on to study at Oxford for two years, and then began legal training at age 16. At age 24 he was admitted to the bar, and went on to a distinguished legal career.

At the same time as More pursued his professional training, he quietly cultivated two other aspects of his life. He was deeply interested in new humanistic learning that was spreading throughout Europe, and counted a number of Europe's leading minds as friends, particularly Desiderius Erasmus, whom he met in 1499. Under their influence, More became an accomplished writer, poet, and translator. More was also deeply interested in religious matters, and during his early legal career lived informally in a house of Carthusian monks in London from 1501 to 1504. He proved not to have a religious vocation, although maintained elements of monastic discipline for the rest of his life.

After deciding on a career in the world, More began a steady rise to the top. He continued his legal practice, served as a Minister of Parliament, and was nominated as Under-Sheriff of London, where he came into contact with some of the members of the unsavory side of London. As a lawyer he developed a reputation for fairness and incorruptibility, and was known to urge his clients to settle their matters without litigation, or if they would not, to pursue a course of litigation that would be the least expensive. Needless to say, this made him very popular. More served on two diplomatic missions on behalf of London merchants to Flanders and Calais, and his success impressed both King Henry VIII and Cardinal Wolsey. During this phase of his life, More married, first to Jane Colt in 1505, with whom he had four children, next to Alice Middleton, a wealthy widow, after Jane's death in 1511. More had a large household, and was deeply devoted to his family. He strove to have them all educated according to Christian humanist principles, and was unusual in his pioneering insistence on education for women. Because of this, his eldest daughter Margaret obtained a reputation as the smartest woman in England. At this time, More also completed a number of writings, including *Utopia*, his most famous work. He was also fascinated by animals, and had quite a menagerie in his house at all times.

In 1517 More was reluctantly persuaded to enter the service of King Henry VIII, who was interested in attracting the best and brightest individuals into royal service. More became in turn Privy Counselor, Master of Requests, a knight, Under Treasurer, Speaker of the House of Commons, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, and High Steward of both Oxford and Cambridge. The above portrait represents More at this phase of his life. He is at the peak of his career: an excellent orator, administrator, and diplomat. He is constantly in the presence of the King or traveling about England with him: the two men are friends, and the King often has discussions with Sir Thomas on learned matters. If anyone wants to see the king, they have to go through More. More's only regrets are an inability to spend as much time with his family as he wants, and a worry about the spread of the ideas of Martin Luther, against whom he wrote a pamphlet in 1523.

Matters begin to change in More's life after this point. He goes on to greater honors, being made Lord Chancellor

(effectively the second-in-command of the kingdom) in 1529. But darker clouds cross his skies: he begins an all-out war on Protestantism in 1528, and is enmeshed in the King's attempts to secure a divorce in 1527. More quietly opposed the divorce, and Henry in time found that the only way to succeed was to break off relations with the Pope, and have Parliament declare him head of the church of England in 1531. More resigned the Lord Chancellorship in the next year and maintained silence when asked to take the Oath of Supremacy in 1534. For this he was imprisoned for fifteen months, sentenced to death on trumped-up charges, and beheaded as a traitor in 1535. His last words were, "I die the King's good servant, but God's first."

Encountered

Sir Thomas More is a paradox, a man caught between two eras in history. On the one hand, he was one of the leading lights of the Renaissance. On the other hand, he was deeply devoted to the medieval order. He was openly skeptical of many Christian practices and superstitions, but deeply devoted to the church and its customs. He was an accomplished scholar, but also a consummate lawyer with a distinguished practical career. He was an open, happy humanist, but also a bitter, scatological hater of protestants. Later in life, he was a man who torn between duty to his king and devotion to his family. And in the end, he was torn between his loyalty to his King and country, and loyalty to his church and conscience.

Thomas More is a natural conservative, a man driven entirely by his Sense of Duty to all the things which he thinks constitute the Established Order: chiefly law and faith. GM's should play him as urbane, pious, witty, and humorous: he will be excellent company for anyone who encounters him. Like most of the people of his time, he also has a strong scatological streak, and is fond of rude jokes and humor. But beneath all this there is another More: pious, private, and deep, who fasts constantly, prays much, and scourges himself. Think of him as a Medieval man in Renaissance clothing, and always remember that beneath the courtier's finery, he wears a hair shirt.

Further Reading

- *The Complete Works of St. Thomas More* (Yale University Press, 15 vols, 1963-1997). Ackroyd, Peter: Sir Thomas More (Doubleday, 1998).
- Bolt, Robert: *A Man for All Seasons* (filmed twice; the 1966 version with Paul Scofield as More is definitely superior to the 1988 Charlton Heston production).

What If?

Turning Points

There are several turning points in More's life where he might have developed out differently. He could have resisted his father's desire that he become a lawyer, and instead devoted himself to the "new learning." In such a world, More's fame would rest on his literary output, which would have been greater. Chances are he would end up wandering Europe like Erasmus, and might have spent the last of his days fleeing the wrath of Henry on the Continent. More also could have remained in the monastery. In such a scenario he would probably have gained some distinction as a preacher and spiritual writer. He would also probably have been a more vocal opponent of the Act of Supremacy, and would have ended up executed in the same way as his friend Bishop John Fisher.

Protestant More

It is possible to imagine More siding with the King on the matter of the Act of Supremacy. In this case he would have been able to remain Lord Chancellor, and would have acted to build up the Church in England. His considerable writing skills would have served well in a propaganda war to defend Henry, his organizational skills would help local control of the Church, and his diplomatic skills would have helped defend Henry's actions before the courts of Europe. More would thus have filled the role of someone like Thomas Cranmer, but given his innate conservatism would have

put his learned stamp on the nascent Church of England, and possibly give it a more medieval Catholic flavor and less Renaissance Protestant character.

Illuminated More

The real Thomas More had absolutely no interest in occult matters. However, he did translate some of the works of the Christian Cabalist Pico Della Mirandola, and many of his friends were in contact with the noted Renaissance occultist Cornelius Agrippa. In an alternate universe, it is possible to imagine Thomas More as a magician of some kind; indeed, his learning would make him a natural "court wizard." The GM could give him some levels of Magery and a number of appropriate spells. Given More's high IQ, he would be a very formidable sorcerer.

"Saint" Thomas More

Thomas More was beatified by the Roman Catholic Church in 1886, and canonized in 1935. These honors reflect his heroic sanctity and his martyr's death. The real Thomas More displayed great piety, but nothing in the way of miracles during his life. A GM interested in alternate history who has strong religious component to his game could make an alternate More into a saint of the legendary order, with all the attendant miracles (see GURPs Religion). Such living sanctity may not have prevented his execution, but it surely would have slowed it.

Explorer More

More's greatest literary work, *Utopia*, is an elaborate description of a technologically-advanced ideal society ruled entirely by the tenets of reason. It started the genre of utopian fiction, and defies easy categorization even today: was it meant to be a systematic treatise, or a sly satire? The work presents itself as an encounter in Antwerp between a fictionalized More and one "Raphael Hythlodæus", a Portuguese traveler and companion to Amerigo Vespucci who has just returned from five years of living on the island of Utopia, a quasi-Communist society somewhere "under the line of the equator." The work was very popular in Europe in its day, and adventurers in a campaign might be interested in seeking out Thomas More to discover the real secret of Utopia. Was there such a place? And, given the absence of Raphael Hythlodæus, would he be interested in accompanying them on a voyage to find the island?

Save Thomas More!

Thomas More is a very popular figure, particularly given his recent popularization in Robert Bolt's play *A Man for All Seasons*. Time travelers from the future might just decide to try and embark on a mission to change history and preserve him from execution. What effect this would have on history, or even whether More himself would be willing to accept it, is up to the GM. Alternatively, someone from the future could try and replace More. This would give them unequalled access to King Henry VIII during a critical time in English history.

In any of these scenarios, it should be noted that More was 58 and in poor health when he was executed. It is very probable that his poor health at the end was due to stress and mistreatment in the Tower. His father was nearly 80 and in good health and active up until his death. Any alternate version of More should take into account the fact that, barring stress or beheading, he would probably have lived as long or longer than his father did.

Appendix Z: Desk of Many Things

Random Office Contents

by Matt Riggsby

Some of the most annoying questions players ask are about detail, particularly details the GM regards as irrelevant. It's tempting to hand-wave questions about niggling detail with "It's not important," but that's usually an unsatisfying response. The GM may also attempt to come up with something on the spur of the moment, but there's always the possibility of your mind going blank at the wrong moment. These problems are particularly annoying if there's a lot of potential information being hand-waved, as when players go through a briefcase, a desk, or a filing cabinet. The lists below are meant to assist GMs in coming up with the contents of such things, as well as anywhere else PCs are likely to find stacks of papers or other large chunks of disorganized information.

These lists are written to describe probable contents of a modern desk or office, but they can be used in almost any setting. In high-tech games, paperless offices may be the standard (although if modern computerized offices are any indication, that day may be far, far off). In such settings, documents will be stored electronically, so characters must gain access to a worker's computer in order to rifle through their virtual desk. Low-tech desks are likely to contain documents which carry the same kinds of information, but they will rarely have a readily recognizable form. Almost everything will be in the form of a descriptive letter, complete with elaborate salutations and perhaps paragraphs of small talk and minor news items. For example, a receipt would be a letter acknowledging the receipt of money in return for described goods, not, as with modern receipts, a simple slip of paper indicating date, a list of code numbers or names, and a column of costs with a total at the bottom. Therefore, it won't be immediately obvious just what any given piece of paper is; characters will have to do some reading.

The lists below can be consulted whenever PCs rifle through a stack of papers. They provide several general categories into which items may fall and a number of examples of what the specific item might be. The GM may pick randomly on an item-by-item basis ("You pick up . . . hmm . . . an office phone list.") or use the lists to quickly and plausibly compose the entire contents of a desk drawer or briefcase in advance. Obviously, choosing completely randomly would yield some implausible results. For example, an accounting clerk would probably have stacks of ledgers and receipts, but very few blueprints. When picking randomly, the GM should be prepared to ignore some results and try again.

- A. **Rough notes/scribble:** A piece of paper with lots of writing on it (doodles, columns of sums, fragmentary sentences, lots of circles, arrows, and underlining), but no clear meaning. It may have the phone number for the nearest Chinese take-out place or the Evil Overlord's ATM code, but only the person who wrote it is likely to know what it's about.

- B. **Creative work:** A work produced in the owner's organization, requiring some sort of creative input or original work. Any of these items (and, indeed, most of the items listed for other categories) may either be in the process of being created or on the desk of a supervisor or reviewer for approval or revision.
 - Photos/drawn art
 - Manuscript
 - Contract
 - Blueprint/map
 - Computer program
 - Page layout (pamphlet, poster, article)
 - Press release/customer or supplier advisory

- C. **Task Reference:** A reference that helps the owner do his job. This can be anything from a technical reference to a brief written sales pitch.
- Map
 - Directory
 - Glossary
 - Schedule/timeline
 - Style sheet
 - Script/task checklist
- D. **Communication:** A document sending information from one person to another, usually a request for something or an acknowledgement.
- Receipt
 - Invoice
 - Purchase order form
 - Application
 - Confirmation
 - Field report
 - Meeting minutes
 - Bid/grant proposal
- E. **Records:** A brief record of activity or financial transactions. Usually, records will be found in batches (that is, a list of checks written, not a single document recording a single check written).
- Debit/credit ledger
 - Activity log
 - Check register
 - Attendance log
 - Cargo/passenger manifest
 - Case history
 - Equipment or vehicle use/maintenance log
- F. **Large printed material:** A finished, professionally published document, usually published outside the organization.
- Advertisement
 - Product catalog
 - Reference book (dictionary, technical manual, atlas)
 - Management/advice book (Sun Tzu, *How To Win Friends and Influence People*)
 - Magazine
 - Newspaper
- G. **Internal Document:** A document concerning the operation of the organization, not necessarily the owner's own job tasks.
- Personnel/policy manual
 - Phone/address list
 - New hire/dismissal/personnel move notice
 - Memo on facilities use/scheduling

H. Personal Items

- Snacks
- Recorded entertainment/player (CD, tape, etc.)
- Books
- Drinks
- Spare clothing
- Favorite mug/cup
- Souvenir (picture, toy, statuette)

I. **Office supplies:** The raw materials of bureaucracy change over time. Low-tech offices have a different set of supplies than modern offices; if future offices are paperless, most office supplies are likely to vanish.

Low-Tech Office

- Writing surfaces: paper (true paper, papyrus, rice paper, and other vegetable papers), parchment (vellum, other treated animal skins), lightly waxed boards, flattened clay
- Writing implements (charcoal sticks, quill and/or brush for paper and parchment, stylus for wax boards and clay)
- Ink (bottled or in a dry stick; may be several different colors)
- Inkwell or ink stone and water bottle (for dry ink)
- Pumice stone (for erasing and preparing parchment)
- Ruler/straight edge
- Sealing wax
- Seal
- String
- Blotting paper/sand shaker (to dry wet ink)
- Knife (probably a tiny one, like a modern X-Acto knife)

Modern Office

- Pens/pencils
- Markers (opaque and highlighter)
- Tape/stapler and staples/paperclips/rubber bands
- Hole punch
- Scissors
- Loose paper (lined or unlined)
- Pads (legal pads, Post-Its)
- Envelopes
- Pushpins
- Glue
- Stick-on labels
- Batteries
- Postage stamps
- Computer disks
- Blank forms

Pyramid Pick

Gear Krieg Wargaming Companion

Published by [Dream Pod 9](#)

Written by Alex Rhodes, Lloyd D. Jessee, Dave Graham, Robert Beck and Pat Paulsen

110 b&w pages; \$17.95

Gamers like blowing the crud out of stuff with giant walking tanks.

Somewhere in the corner of our collective soul, there is a spot that yearns for giant clanking metal behemoths armed to the teeth with weapons of mass destruction. If there is such a place, it is probably right next to the part that makes shooting Nazis so satisfying. *Gear Krieg*, Dream Pod 9's war game of pulp super-science should have delivered both. It didn't. I wanted to bestride the battlefield like a colossus, every panzer in sight meat for my guns. It was not to be. The "gears" (the walking tanks or panzer mechs) in the rulebook were early war models (the book only covered up until 1941) and like their real life counterparts in the tank world, they were slow, under-armed, and unreliable.

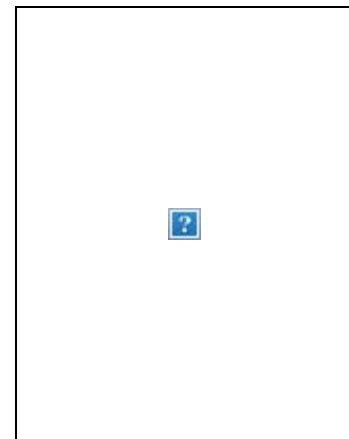
The *Gear Krieg Wargaming Companion* advances the time-line to 1943 and the gears are most definitely in the house. The newer gears -- the General Jackson, the Donner, the Uller, and the Wagsworth, among others -- are all faster, more powerful and more heavily armed than their early war brethren. These boys can take most light and medium tanks in a toe to toe fight and still go places they can't. Gears still need support from the dull old tanks and infantry, but they're not the joke they used to be.

The vehicles and equipment section is a mixture of mid-war equipment and weird science. Tank fanciers get stats for the M4 Sherman and the deadly Tiger tank as well as some cool super science vehicles. The Russians get super-heavy tanks armed with ray guns, while the Americans get the Tucker APC, an armored sports car. The British get tanks with infra-red searchlights and the Italians get . . . well the Italians get dodgy tin cans on legs . . . but it's the thought that counts, right?

One of the reasons the *Gear Krieg* main rule book felt so bare were that the infantry rules were very sparse and there were no rules for artillery, which Stalin called "The God of War." These areas are covered, and there are a bunch of other rules covering combat engineering, minefields, chemical, and biological weapons. These are all things that you would get with an ordinary vanilla WW2 game and I can't help asking "Why weren't they in the main book?" But if the main rulebook was bare, the *Companion* is an embarrassment of riches. There are rules for everything here. The campaign and scenario rules in particular are very elegant allowing players to bid against each other to inflict difficulties like ammo shortages, friendly fire and cowardice on the opposition.

All of this is well and good, but it's not much different from what you'd find in a normal historical rules set. However, it is in the weird stuff that the *Companion* really shines. In addition to the Ray Gun tanks, walkers and other craziness, there are also rocket packs, radio-controlled bombs, combat drugs and best of all, brain-washed Nazi zombies! How can you not love a game that has hordes of Nazi zombies? The rules for heroes cover everything from Nazi Ubermenchen to two-fisted good guys like Sergeant Rock. But be careful, heroes are very powerful and it is advised to use them sparingly to prevent them from taking over the game.

The *Wargaming Companion* is 110 pages of softback book absolutely packed with ideas for the *Gear Krieg* gamer. It takes the original game -- which had some great ideas but poor execution -- and turns it into a fully fledged wargame that'll do whatever you want it to. Illustrated in black and white, the DP9 crew are moving in the right direction in



using more Photoshopped pictures rather than the amateurish pencil sketches that marred the original. All in all, it's a good product that a ***Gear Krieg*** player will get a lot of play value from. My only complaints are that the researchers still seem to be watching Saving Private Ryan for ideas -- the Sticky Bomb was not a jury rigged device, but a real life anti-tank weapon mass produced by the British at the start of the war. The book also lacks a bibliography, something it shares with all the ***Gear Krieg*** books, which seems very odd given the games pseudo-historical background. That said, this book has an awful lot to offer. You may want to hold off introducing all the new rules at once, as some of them are quite complicated and can slow the game to a crawl. If you're only an occasional ***Gear Krieg*** player, it may not be worth your while picking up the ***Companion***, but if you're a fan of the game and would like to expand it, it's worth invading Poland for.

--*Eamon Honan*

Pyramid Review

Jedi Knights CCG

Published by [Decipher, Inc.](#)

Designed by Tom Lischke et. al.

Illustrated by Dan Burns et. al.

Starter Deck 60 cards, rule book, \$11.95

Booster Pack 11 cards, \$3.29

Jedi Knights is the new collectible card game from Decipher, Inc. based in the *Star Wars* universe around the time of Episode IV, A New Hope. Each game is a battle in space and on the surfaces of four different planets, climaxing in an epic Final Conflict. The game features simultaneous turns within a looping structure that will force many players to keep one hand on the rule book for their first few games. Fans of complex card games and the *Star Wars* movies will find *Jedi Knights* an enjoyable challenge.

Most notable among *Jedi Knights'* features is the card art which is entirely computer generated. Some of the cards depict scenes from the movies while others are shots that never happened on film. Most of the art is satisfactory to excellent, especially for Darth Vader and the Storm Troopers who benefit from the bright and shiny details available with a computer. While the aliens look very nice as well, many humans, such as Obi-Wan Kenobi and Grand Moff Tarkin, look a little like the famous actors, but more like their weird uncles.

Jedi Knights has a fairly typical rarity scheme. There are 154 cards in the premiere set. 50 are rare and the rest are split between common, uncommon, and fixed. As a matter of CCG course, the rare cards are the most powerful and a deck containing more rare cards has an advantage over a deck with fewer. A booster pack contains one rare and ten more cards divided between common and uncommon. Each player uses a deck of at least 40 cards, with a limit of five of any individual card. This can make purchasing all of those commons in the booster packs somewhat painful.

Two or four players take up the sides of the Rebel Alliance and the Empire. Many of the game's cards are playable by only one side or the other. However, there are also neutral cards, such as Jawas and Tusken Raiders, which may be used by either side.

Players must not only decide if they will fight for the glory of the Light or Dark Sides; they must also choose one of four Themes. Each Theme makes certain cards easier to bring into play. Your Theme also controls the size of your starting hand as well as creating a reserve set of cards that appear at specific points in the game. Finally, each Theme has a Hero card that can reappear even after being defeated. This allows a player to be sure that Darth Vader will show up in nearly every battle if she is playing the Darth Vader Theme. The other themes in the premiere set of Jedi Knights are Han Solo, Luke Skywalker, and Grand Moff Tarkin.

Each turn, players will choose one Force card from a deck of Force cards numbered one through eight. The higher number goes first in each phase of the turn, but will receive fewer Credits for the turn and will draw fewer cards at the end. Credits allow a player to bring cards into play, with the more powerful cards costing more. Each Force card is usable only once, so players must decide if they require initiative, Credits, or more cards in their hands when deciding on a Force number.

Next, players take turns deploying cards from their hands on to the planet, or in space around the planet. They continue until both sides have run out of Credits or do not wish to play further cards.

Then the Starship violence commences. Players fire Starship weapons in an effort to score some easy kills. If any ships survive, players compare the numerical Power rating of the main ships in the battle, and the lower side loses its ships. Several different Starship battles can take place in one turn, depending on how the ships team up with one another. Any ship that did not participate in a battle can Blockade characters on the ground. This prevents that character from taking an action this turn. Thus, Starships participate only indirectly in the control of the planet.

Once players are done shooting themselves out of the sky, they can take blasters to one another on the planet's surface. Character battles are conducted in the same manner as Starship battles, with weapon fire then a Power rating comparison.

All throughout the fight, players can use Event cards to tip the scales in their favor. These cards affect everything from the number of credits they have available, to the chance a gun will hit, to the number of cards they can draw.

If this is the second turn at a planet, the side with the highest combined character Power rating will win the planet. If the winner takes the first three planets, the game is over and he has won. If not, won planets will provide extra Credits used in the Final Conflict. The turn ends with players drawing the number of cards specified by their Force cards and starting all over again at a new planet.

This describes the first six turns of the game; however, the seventh leads to the Final Conflict. Throughout the game, any card not destroyed during a battle is set aside under a player's Theme card. In the Final Conflict, a player may play cards not only from her hand, but also from her Theme pile. The winner is the last side standing after the Final Conflict.

Jedi Knights turn structure resembles a computer program with subroutines looping inside of loops. Remembering where you are in a loop and whose turn it is to initiate a loop takes some practice. Anyone experienced with the original *Star Wars CCG* from Decipher will find this game less complicated; however, *Jedi Knights* is still relatively intricate by card game standards.

Yet it is this complexity that provides many of the strategic opportunities in the game. A player may decide to give up a planet he feels he can not win in an effort to conserve cards for a future battle. Players must decide how many star ships to commit to a battle given that they only indirectly help the warriors on the ground. Of course, who to shoot and when to shoot them is always an issue.

Perhaps more than any other card game based on a motion picture, *Jedi Knights* does a delightful job of feeling like a movie. It contains several smaller battles that lead up to one giant fight at the end which features the successful characters from earlier in the game. Although you may be at a loss to explain why Urur the Tusken Raider shows up on Hoth armed with Luke Skywalker's blaster to help defend Yoda from a TIE fighter pilot.

--Bradley Andrew Weier

Pyramid Review

Doomstones: Heart of Chaos (For Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay)

Published by [Hogshead Publishing](#)

Written by Robin D. Laws

Illustrated by Ralph Horsley, Ian Cooke & Danny Willis

\$18.95

Since taking up the reins of *Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay*, the game's fans have been waiting for Hogshead Publishing to release three books. The first of these is *Realms of Sorcery*, the expansion of *WFRP*'s magic system, first promised at the time of the game's initial release in 1986 and due out soon. The second is *Empire in Chaos*, the culmination of the epic *The Enemy Within* campaign first released as *Empire in Flames* and currently awaiting revision. The third is the final part of the *Doomstones Trilogy*. Fans then should rejoice, because Hogshead Publishing have now released that third and final part with *Doomstones: Heart of Chaos*, and it has been written by Robin Laws no less.

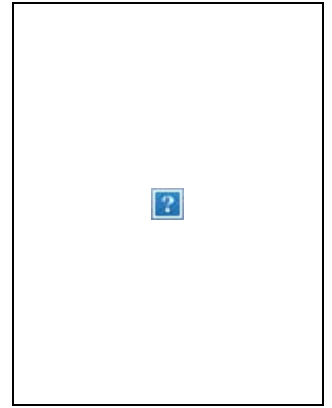
The *Doomstones* series have had something of a tortuous history. Originally published as scenarios for *AD&D*, Flame publications reworked them for *WFRP* as *Fire in the Mountains* and *Blood In Darkness, Death Rock and Dwarf Wars*. Under the Hogshead banner these have become *Fire and Blood* and *Wars and Death*. A more complete examination and discussion of the series can be found in issue #17 of the unofficial *WFRP* magazine *Warpstone*.

[SPOILER ALERT!]

The series takes place in the Yetzin Valley in the region of the Border Princes with the characters learning of four ancient crystals of power created by Dwarven engineers long ago and each keyed to one of the four elements. Spurred on by the possibilities of these items, the players first find the crystal of Fire and attune themselves to its awesome capabilities, followed by the crystals of Earth, Air, and Water. By the end of *Wars and Death* all four crystals have been found and attuned to the players, when they suddenly leap from their grasps and fuse into one. Then things begin to go just ever so slightly wrong for the characters, starting with visions that suggest that putting these crystals together was a really, really bad idea. What were they expecting? They're not called Doomstones for nothing.

Heart of Chaos is a fantastic looking book, clearly written and laid out, but not without the occasional typographical error. These are mostly spelling mistakes, although one table appears either to have been misplaced, not cross-referenced, or needed to be printed twice. Also, the dreaded "pXX" also makes several appearances, but thankfully this is only in the one chapter and actually refers to information within that chapter. Both the "pXX's" and the misplaced table do make their respective chapters awkward to run. These problems aside, this is a very nice-looking book, illustrated solely throughout by Ralph Horsley. His art reflects *Warhammer*'s grim and perilous feel often with a humorous touch, as well as illustrating many key moments in the adventure. Together with Ian Cooke, Ralph Horsley also provides *Heart of Chaos* with cartography that is both clear and attractive.

The adventure opens with a reprint of the last few pages found in the current edition of *Wars and Death*, which Hogshead has considerately included for those that own the Flame Publications editions of the adventures rather than their own. As the players come round from their visions -- which have been keyed to both the pre-generated characters found in the earlier books and to the player's own through their highest stats -- they find themselves in a



severe downpour, in the knowledge that they have done something really bad, and that the Chaos god of change Tzeentch is involved. (Did I mention that they are called Doomstones?)

Brief respite can be found at Urdevar, a collection of hovels whose inhabitants eke a pitiful existence from the scratchings of a played-out silver mine. Here they will find that the malign effect of the crystal will cause trouble wherever they go and as society in Urdevar breaks down, it receives more visitors in the form of Imperial Agents, members of the Order of Coldfire Knights. Ruthless in their pursuit of chaos and other threats to the Empire, they have learnt of the Crystal of Power and the threat it represents. Unfortunately, they know more about the crystal than the characters do. Finding this out alerts the knights and sets up a chase that lasts until the finale of the adventure.

With Urdevar in chaos, the players must again brave the elements to locate someone more knowledgeable about the crystals. That someone is a dwarf involved in the construction of the crystals, and considering that he is now over 4000 years old, is grumpy as hell. His information sends them to the original construction site, after they have been chased by Coldfire Knights, tobogganed down off the mountain in a hut and found themselves with a worshipful retinue of Beastman followers. That's right, Chaos Beastmen just love the stench of Chaos that the players just happen to be sweating.... And they think the party are champions of Chaos too.

The construction site is long abandoned, but guarded by members of a Dwarven order dedicated to keeping the four crystals apart. The Brotherhood Of Memory is a second group to be set upon the party's trail. Woe betide the characters if both the Brotherhood and the Cold Fire Knights decide to team up, but since this is a *Warhammer* adventure, that will never happen, right? The ghosts of those who built the crystals haunt the complex, still arguing over whose fault it was that construction went wrong. They hold the key to what actually went so wrong, but are too blinded by grudges to see it. With the intervention of the players, they should be able to work whose fault it was.

This still leaves the party with the problem of how to destroy the crystal and it's something that their creators do not have the solution to. A Beastman ally suggests that the answers might lie in a secret colony of chaos cultists. As unpalatable as this might be, this is the only way to learn the secret thoughts of Tzeentch and the party must ingratiate themselves into the cult. This can be a decidedly messy business and means interacting with a quite hideously unsavoury bunch of individuals! Learning what they need is a challenging task to roleplay, and although an easier solution is provided, it is potentially far more damaging to the players.

After immersing themselves in the mire of a chaos cult, the group has an opportunity for respite (including a hot bath) in the penultimate encounter, before their destiny beckons once more. The encounter also gives them the means of getting them to the hole in the sky where the Crystal must go to for it to be destroyed and the Old World saved -- a Dwarven built airship! Riding the airship to this destination is the exhilarating finale to *Heart of Chaos* and the characters must succeed whilst being chased by Daemons of Tzeentch, Dwarf-piloted gyrocopters and a chaotic storm... all hell-bent on preventing their success.

And thus, the Old World is saved, at least for another four thousand years. If the players survive, it is possible that they will have gained a Beastman mutation, a handful of insanity points, and even a whispering tumor, but at least they will have saved the world. That would be in the Hollywood ending to *Heart of Chaos*, which would be fitting as it is a cinematic adventure, but *Heart of Chaos* is also a *Warhammer* scenario, so alternative endings are also included. In the actual *Warhammer* ending, they succeed and pay the price for attuning themselves to the crystals. "The Third Way" is the other suggested ending, which is altogether a far happier affair. Sequels and Disasters are also discussed, with one price of failure being a post-apocalyptic future for the Old World.

[END SPOILER ALERT]

Heart of Chaos is designed for characters in their second or third career. It presents them with a tough challenge that is reminiscent (and nearly as deadly) as many a classic Call of Cthulhu campaign. It is also a very linear adventure, but when a Chaos god wants to bring about the end of the world, neither he nor prophecy leaves much room for choice. There is good advice for the referee who has not run a linear adventure before, and *Heart of Chaos* also gives advice and suggestions on how to run each chapter and scene. All of the NPCs are presented in loving detail and referees should relish the chance to roleplay every one of them, just as much as the players should enjoy (and sometimes recoil in horror from) interacting with them.

Heart of Chaos benefits greatly from having a fresh eye cast upon *WFRP* and the *Doomstones trilogy*. Robin D. Laws has created a rousing, hell for leather, roller coaster ride of a climax to the series. The *Warhammer* world has always been described as one that is both grim and perilous, and for the players this will be an adventure that is more perilous and more grim than they will have ever played before. Although this may be a career-ending adventure for them, this is not one that they are likely to forget in a hurry. For the *WFRP* GM, this the chance to really dish out all that peril and grimness with legitimate relish. Enjoy.

--*Matthew Pook*

Advantaging Your Press

I was recently the guy in charge of registration at the 2001 World Yo-Yo Contest, which meant sitting behind a desk and helping people sign up for the contest.

Nickelodeon was on hand to tape the event, and they were filming a segment about a newbie participating in this contest. I was a part of this sketch, playing the guy in charge of registration. I sat behind a desk and helped said person sign up for the contest.

I was very convincing, I must say . . . if I don't get an Ace award, it's clearly because the entire system is rigged.

Anyway, that event reiterated in my mind one of the fiddly points I like to drive home in more modern (and many sci-fi) settings: The media is powerful, weird, and -- in many ways -- inscrutable.

For the few minutes of actual video they shot of me, they tied up my booth for about 20-30 minutes, were entering the "staff-only" booth to get a better shot, and just generally did things that normal folks aren't allowed to do. And we let them. Because, hey, they're the media.

So here (in no discernable order) are a few random thoughts regarding the gaming prospects of the media.

1. The media can go where other folks normally can't.

Consider that you wanted to talk to, say, the president of the city's largest bank. The odds aren't so good, depending on how busy the president is, his mood, and the like.

But if you're a reporter from the City Daily Sentinel Star Globe, suddenly your odds are much better. Whether you're doing a report on the City's Most Powerful People or an investigation into irregularities with the bank, you'll probably get to speak to him (even though it may take a while and you might need to jump through hoops). This might help explain why Superman's secret identity of Clark Kent is a reporter; his reporter guise allows him to get information that would be unavailable even to one who can bend iron bars in his bare hands.

Of course, the larcenous among us already realize the potential of the press' power to go where others cannot; all you really need to do to speak with important people or go interesting places is to have it *appear* that you're part of the press. (Of course, in most settings you'll need credentials, passes, and other validating methods. But heroes are often clever in coming up with ways of acquiring such . . . for a good cause, naturally.) And this ability can be used for evil as well; in the movie *Air Force One*, for example, the bad guys use forged press credentials to sneak aboard . . . well, I won't give it away. But it's an airplane -- an important one.

And don't forget that heroes, by their natures, are often "important people." As such, the press will usually want to talk to *them*. Remember that someone doesn't need to be a movie star or powerful figure to attract the eyes -- or thorns -- of the media. The news is full of incidents every day involving otherwise normal people who spark the media's (and public's) imagination. Given how heroes are usually doing things much more exciting than your standard 15-minuter, they should be naturals for the press.

(And, of course, to combine the two: People may *claim* to be with the press to get near the heroes for their own purposes . . .)

2. The media is (theoretically) after the truth; the truth is unknowable.

Yes, I personally subscribe to the theory that, if there *is* an absolute truth, it's beyond our mortal eyes to discern it. We're stuck with our own human perceptions and biases, and try to sort out our own views on reality. (It was easy for me to run *Mage* . . .)

What does this mean for a roleplaying game? Well, simply that any story probably has (at least) two sides, and the press may well try to present those sides. For every story about a hero who manages to subdue a terrorist at the last possible moment, there could be another story about how traffic and commerce were adversely affected for hours as authorities sought to disarm the terrorist's bomb. Or the terrorist's story about how he pleaded to give up, but the hero kept hitting him and hitting him regardless. (Yes, bad guys occasionally lie.) The media could choose any -- or all -- of these avenues to explore. The more grandiose the adventure, the more paid experts that will crawl out of the ground with 30-second sound clips commenting on some aspect of that adventure.

In this way, the PCs may become victims of their own successes. If the heroes save the city again for the jilionth time, the press may not be that interested in covering it as a normal story. Instead, they might take alternate -- even accusatory -- angles. How much property damage was done in this latest battle? Why weren't the heroes or authorities able to take a more proactive approach in stopping the incident? Why do costumed freaks keep attacking this city? And so on.

3. The media has its own views and ways of doing things.

The press is not above creative licensing, reenactments (where they may not tell the audience they're doing such), photo manipulation, and other questionable tactics. Certainly not *all* -- or even most -- members of the press does such, but enough does that it's not terribly surprising when it does happen.

Combine this with the fact that the press may not know the full truth (as discussed above), and you have the potential for intentionally or accidentally reporting a wildly inaccurate view of what really happened.

When the press does it intentionally, it is normally modifying a story so that it's simpler, more compact, or otherwise more pat. If your campaign is heavily steeped in conspiracy theories and other weirdness, said theories will generally not receive any media play outside of mimeographed newsletter. It's *always* the work of lone nuts. If your story involves heavy financial or geopolitical sophistication, it will probably be simplified to the point of being unrecognizable.

When the press doesn't have the full story, what it *does* know can lead to amusing, damaging, or weird results. For example, much of the action of the movie *Goldeneye* isn't public knowledge. What is visible -- and thus might make headlines -- is the scene where James Bond is driving a tank through Russian streets. Who knows what those headlines would read? Who would they interview? What explanation would result? "Madman Steals Russian Tank?" "Russian Military Denies Out-Of-Control Military Action?" "Incredible Frog Boy Escapes Russian Prison?"

For this view, consider whatever the public effects of your private adventures are, then consider how the press would react to them. In *Call of Cthulhu*, for example, the only visible effect might be some mysterious deaths aboard a train, or the destruction of an old temple. In a Cyberpunk game, the only mention of the heroes' actions might be a corporation issuing a statement regarding an aberration in future earnings ("caused by the obliteration of the secret Googlechip Project by gun-wielding 'runners" will *not* be mentioned . . .).

The press is a wonderful thing, and I'm glad to live in an era where the potential for information and reporting is stronger than ever before. But that power and potential also means that they're perfect for many roleplaying situations.

Like infiltrating the den of intrigue and adventure that is the World Yo-Yo Contest . . .

* * *

As an aside, I feel humbled to point out that I had as many people recognize my name and accomplishments with *Pyramid* at the World Yo-Yo Contest as I did at last year's Dragon*Con . . . which is to say that I have two fans between the two events. (Of course, at the Yo-Yo Contest I wasn't sprawled across an SJ Games table wailing, "You know . . . Steven Marsh? *Pyramid*? Me?!?" until Steve was forced to taser me into the Goth-Stor-It. So this is clearly a step in the right direction.)

* * *

Kenneth Hite is taking the week off; apparently Lucien needs help rearranging the Library of Dreams, and has recruited the one guy who can help him organize everything. Hopefully he'll be back next week.

--*Steven Marsh*

* * *

*Last week's answer: **Terror in Freeport**, p. 2.* (At my friendly local game shop, I purchased ***Madness in Freeport***, ***Terror in Freeport***, and ***Death in Freeport*** all at the same time. This prompted the otherwise stoic store owner to comment, "Gee, you think after a while people would stay out of Freeport . . ."

(Three stars) "You May Already Have Won 1,000,000,000.00 Dollars! SUCKER!"

Psi, Psi West

by Chad Underkoffler

"I'm your huckleberry." -- Doc Holliday, *Tombstone*

Genre: "Spaghetti" Westerns, plus Psychic Powers (possible spins include Supers, Horror, or SF).

Style: Action, Drama.

Themes: Divided Loyalties, Man vs. Nature, Man vs. Man, Order vs. Chaos

Campaign Setting & Background Information

This campaign is intended to take its cues from the highly iconic and universal field of Western movies. This is the Wild West of *Silverado*, *High Plains Drifter*, *Unforgiven*, and the *Good, the Bad, and the Ugly*, with a dollop of Orson Scott Card's *Tales of Alvin Maker* for leavening and a dash of Zorro for zest. It is not intended to serve as a rigorous Alternate History, and no attempt is made here to slot it into a timeline. For this Western Campaign, the "history" is scenery and symbol for the archetypal stories brought to life within it. The date is 186-; the American Civil War could still be raging, or could be long over; precise dates of introduction of a particular revolver are unimportant, while the fact that a character's daddy taught him to use that Colt Dragoon is paramount.

What Everyone Knows

There had always been rumors of folks with gifts and talents beyond that of the norm. In other days they were called shamans, seers, or witches. Today they're called "huckleberries." In late Eighteenth Century slang, "huckleberry" was used often as an adjective -- it had a host of meanings: "sweet/darling," "a negligible thing or person," and a "special man for the job" or "the desired or suitable person" for a task. It was also used in gambling circles: one could "bet a huckleberry to a persimmon," which meant placing a small bet. However, huckleberry is being used here to signify something unique -- from the phrase "the only huckleberry on the bush" -- discussing the wondrous nature of their strange gifts.

Huckleberries started showing up about fifteen years ago. They have demonstrable supernatural abilities that are currently unable to be explained by science. It has become obvious, however, that these strange powers are directed by conscious will and thought, and act only through the agency of a human mind.

These talents include:

- **The Sight:** The most common gift is that of Second Sight. This includes most forms of extrasensory perception. Someone with the Sight can see auras, get flashes of the future, dowse a well, read the past of an object, see and communicate with ghosts, track a person by one of their possessions, speak prophecy, and see far places in time and space. People with the Sight are generally accepted, if not respected. (Few people in their right mind would gamble with them, though.)
- **The Touch:** The second most common talent is that of Laying on of Hands. A person with the Touch can seal wounds closed, fuse broken bones, reach into a person and remove bullets (or organs), calm fears, take away or grant pains of mind and body, and can physically touch ghosts and astral beings, even if there's no ectoplasm around (see below). People with the Touch are sought out and honored.
- **Mind Over Matter aka "The Mustard":** Even more extraordinary than the Sight or the Touch is that of Mind Over Matter. It takes its slang term from a Biblical verse:

And Jesus said unto them, "Because of your unbelief: for verily I say unto you, if ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain: 'Remove hence to yonder place;' and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you"

-- Matthew 17:20.

Someone who has the Mustard can walk on broken legs, sit motionless for long periods, move small things through the power of his will alone, go without food, water, or air three times longer as the average man, take six bullets in the chest and remain standing, lift heavy burdens with ease, cause fires to spark or water to freeze, ignore extremes of temperature or pressure, perform strenuous hard labor for three straight days, resist extreme pain, or even levitate themselves in the air. Folks are a bit scared of people with the Mustard, but this is often obviated somewhat by how useful such talented people can be in building, ranching, mining, and such. Overall, folks are wary of those with a strong gift for Mind Over Matter.

- **The Tongue of Fire aka "Witching":** The most rare huckleberry talent is that of full mental communication. The possessor of the Tongue of Fire can read and send thoughts and emotions in people, ghosts, and animals; manufacture or eliminate memories at will; create overpowering illusions that exist only in the onlookers' minds; send their soul away from their body by "astral projection," use another living creature's senses as their own; enter and manipulate another's dreams; and even control people from afar like puppets on a string. Folks don't cotton much to people with the Tongue of Fire; it's too hard to trust that those huckleberries aren't witchin' them when their backs are turned. People with the Tongue of Fire are feared and hounded.

One out of every thousand souls has a powerful enough talent to invoke at will; close to one out of every hundred thousand has two fully controllable gifts; the chance of having three strong abilities is one in a million -- and there's only been one verified case (see below, Audrey Miller). Some mildly blasphemous sorts claim that the only Person to have four gifts died over eighteen hundred years ago on a Cross. Religious folk tend to either class the special talents of a 'berry as curse or blessing.

Some havoc has ensued -- but much less than one might expect in most of the country. The impact on most people's lives is minimal -- perhaps Uncle Claude's a better dowser, or they have another reason to hate Leticia Buncombe from down the lane. But city dwellers have been getting mighty skittish -- all those people together, some of those folks are bound to be huckleberries. You get too many of them in one place and everybody's gonna get stained when the juice starts flying

That's why the authorities Back East have started cracking down hard: some states favor registration, others force conscription into the state militias, still others choose imprisonment . . . or execution. The West calls even more loudly because of these things. In addition to the draw of wide open spaces and chance for a fresh start, some folk are tempted by the lure of learning hidden Indian teachings of power -- the redskins are known to be masters of the Sight. Others believe in the stories of a safe-harbor called Haven. Still others flee the tyranny of other minds yammering at them in close quarters at all hours of the day and night. Numerous 'berries make for the frontier, in order to live free.

People like the so-called "Huckleberry Queen" Audrey Miller -- a soiled dove who's probably the most powerful 'berry West of the Mississippi. The Hopfrog Kid -- whose temper is as quick as his hog leg. Ghost Hawk -- the powerful Indian medicine man who defends his tribe and his way of life from the invading white man. Heartbreaker Jack -- a former Confederate officer on the run, and hunted by former allies and enemies alike. Folks like these huckleberries are playing out their personal stories on the range.

What Everyone Doesn't Know

- **Origins of Huckleberries:** Here are some options offered to select from. Mix and match at whim:
 1. **Volcano/Solar Flare:** The combination of a volcanic eruption in 1830 and increased sporadic sunspot activity in the decades since, have increased the level of beginning mutation worldwide, along with some spectacular sunsets. Do these mutations breed true? This option could be the structure for a nascent pulp or superheroic world, much along the lines of Philip Jose Farmer's *Wold Newton* stories.
 2. **An Open Door:** When the Fox Sisters communicated with the spirits of the dead in 1848, a long-closed doorway opened into the astral plane. Now the barriers between thought and form are ever weakening; soon the world may be threatened with an invasion of monsters from their darkest nightmares. This option could lead to stories based on psychological horror made flesh, as images and archetypes from the hidden

subconscious burst forth into waking life, or to sorties dealing with the power and terror of the human soul.

3. **Alien Experimentation:** Secretly, aliens are breeding for mental powers. Is it for use as soldiers? Weapons? Successors? Food? Entertainment? This option can lead full-bore into science fiction of the most outrageous sort, with possible spins from Earth-based rebellion against the hidden Alien Masters to defending the borders of the Interstellar Union of the High Frontier.
- **Ghosts:** The spirits of the dead that communicate with Sighted mediums, aren't. Even they don't realize this. Ghosts are not the actual souls of the departed; they are complex astral structures formed out of a psychic residue "broadcast" from other people's memories, fears, or expectations of them. This can explain the often-abrupt personality changes that people seem to undergo after death; the drunkard becomes a saint of temperance, for example. An exception may be those gifted with the Tongue of Fire who are out gallivanting around through astral projection when their body dies. They are essentially free spirits until the passage of time grinds them down the level of other ghosts; this erosion process takes around forty days.
- **The Mayor of Argent Valley (see below, NPCs & Their Goals):** David Bridgetower is a patriot, a businessman, a sonuvabitch, a megalomaniac, and a secret huckleberry. He's twigged on a technique that allows him to borrow the strength and gifts of willing followers through Witching. He's got big plans, unbridled ambition, and a rattlesnake's mind behind an affable exterior.
- **Huckleberry Haven:** Haven hasn't actually been built yet (see below, Items & Locations).

NPCs & Their Goals

- **The Huckleberry Queen (Audrey Miller), Soiled Dove Powerhouse:** Born a half-breed, in civilized Kentucky, Audrey Miller discovered herself the match for many men as she grew older -- and that was before even taking into her account the three potent gifts of the Sight, the Touch, and the Tongue of Fire. She fled West to escape not just the tyranny of that state against huckleberries, but also the strictness of social mores. Self-interest is her motivating force; all aspects of her life -- including her indulgence in charity -- spring from that motivation. Notably, she claims not to be particularly interested in the concept of Haven as laid out by Reverend Simnul -- she finds his idea of a society a bit too blue-nosed and restrictive. Audrey is proprietress of a dance hall known as "The Huckleberry Queen" (see below, Items & Locations).
- **David Bridgetower, Politician and Entrepreneur:** Former Union colonel, this black sheep of a moneyed Eastern family has come to the wilderness to fulfill his desire for power over others. With his hidden Tongue of Fire, he easily gained control of a small cow town named Argent Valley. He is ruthless in his efforts to increase the range of land and people under his dominion; however, he does legitimately care for those he sees as under his "charge."
- **Ghost Hawk, Wielder of Big Medicine:** Indian Medicine Man, gifted with both the Sight and the Tongue of Fire. He is deeply committed to defending his people from the white man, but his heart is drawn strongly to the half-breed huckleberry Audrey Miller -- he has seen a Vision of them holding hands across a river of blood. He despises the Hopfrog Kid, both because he is white and because he is his rival for Audrey's attentions, but respects the man's strong spiritual gifts.
- **The Hopfrog Kid (Nathan Lang), Mustard Gunslinger:** When the bandit Black Matthias gunned down his father and brother in the streets of Hopfrog Butte, twelve-year-old Nathan was left alone in the world. Dedicating himself to the art of the quick-draw, he became one of the deadliest shots in the West. It took six years (and the emergence of his gift of the Mustard) before he found and gunned down Black Matthias in the street like the dog he was. Now, the Hopfrog Kid drifts from place to place, a gun for hire -- though he finds himself ever circling back to Hopfrog Butte and the waiting arms of the Huckleberry Queen.
- **Heartbreaker Jack:** The true name of this former Confederate officer is clouded in a blood-red fog. What is known is that Jack is a huckleberry with a Talent for the Touch and a hunger for the flesh of other men. He been a mercenary, a bandit, and even served one short-lived stretch as the Sheriff of a mining town. Meticulous in dress and appearance, he is kind to children and animals. However, any adult that crosses him risks loss of a vital organ, removed by Jack's huckleberry Touch, and prepared in the finest French style of cuisine.
- **Professor Anthony Vita, Snake-Oil Scientist:** Anthony Vita was a small-time medicine showman, eking out a living selling Kickapoo Silver Patent Medicine Remedy when he witnessed a Sighted huckleberry divining the future. As the beads of ectoplasm sweated down the 'berry's forehead, an idea was born. "Professor" Vita has

formulated a patent medicine of his own -- "Professor Vita's Patented Latency Enhancer and Strengtheners," which incorporates the mysterious slime in its manufacture (see below, Items & Locations). While this snake oil is presented as an oral medicine, Vita has become addicted to injections of pure ectoplasm, as well as the temporary and mild expression of all four gifts it evokes. He must constantly seek out new money for his coffers, audiences for his shows, and sources of ectoplasm for his vats. He has a small handful of performers that also serve as henchmen for his nefarious schemes.

Other NPCs for use in your Psi, Psi West Campaign:

- *Buffalo Pete* -- Sighted Black Bounty Hunter.
- *Fanshaw* -- Cowboy known as "the Horse Witch" for his skill at talking with animals.
- *Beulah Jamison* -- White female Bostonian and sharp-dressed Riverboat Gambler.
- *John Leaping Wolf* -- Indian Agent and Temperance Crusader.
- *Krieger Mason* -- Foolhardy but capable Texas Ranger.
- *Maria Luisa McGee* -- Irish-Mexican Rancher, with a powerful talent of Mind Over Matter.
- *Saul & Sara Ross* -- Mercenary Couple, their guns sold to the highest bidder.
- *Reverend Tobias Simnul* -- Visionary (not in the 'berry sense) Preacher, "founder" of Haven.
- *Claude Tournette* -- French-Canadian Bandit Chief and Tactical Genius
- *Jedediah Warner* -- Crazy Old Coot, erstwhile Chuck Wagon Cook.

Items & Locations

- **Ectoplasm:** A translucent greenish slime that seems to condense out of the air like fog when there's a lot of psychic activity happening. If a seer with the Sight is trying to see what the weather will be like next week, she might start sweating little drops of it; if a cowboy with the Mustard is lifting a calf out of a mud pit, streamers of the goo will form between the two of them. When the use of the talent stops, it quickly evaporates away. It can be kept indefinitely in an airtight container, however.
- **"Professor Vita's Patented Latency Enhancer and Strengtheners":** Patent medicine composed of rum, water, huckleberry juice, fermented cactus juice, and (a small amount of) ectoplasm. Hyped as a sovereign cure for all ills, the Latency and Strengtheners is also purposed to help the imbibers develop and express his hidden psychic gifts. Interestingly enough, while it may aid latent 'berries in accessing their talents, it tends to have a dulling effect on emergent gifts.
- **Argent Valley:** A humble cow town, quickly growing increasingly more civilized under the watchful eye of Mayor David Bridgetower. In the scant year of his tenure, Argent Valley has gone from a mere flyspeck on the map to a serious contender for the county seat, and then capital of the territory. Currently, Argent Valley is not on any rail lines, but there is talk of advancing a spur, both because of Argent Valley's silver mining operations as well as their position on one of the major cattle drive trails. Argent Valley boasts a public school, a doctor, an opera house, and an amazing general store.
- **Hopfrog Butte:** Little more than the crossing of two roads, Hopfrog Butte boasts only three things of interest: The Huckleberry Queen Dance Hall; Isaac Slotmeyer, a Jewish blacksmith; and the largest sheep-shearing station in the territory. Also the home of Nathan Lang, aka the Hopfrog Kid, and Audrey Miller, the Huckleberry Queen.
- **The Huckleberry Queen Dance Hall:** A saloon/"sporting house" where entertainments involving verifiable huckleberry gals are available for the discerning and generous gentleman. The whiskey is better than the swill normally served in such places, and the food is even better. The women are friendly, the gambling is fair, and the music is loud. The Huckleberry Queen employs three bouncers and two bartenders, of which one will have the Tongue and one will have the Mustard. Interestingly, male huckleberries are stood a free drink (one per night), and there are rumors of other "perks" that are offered gratis.
- **Haven:** Reverend Simnul has gathered a small band of true believers around him, dedicated to the idea of a city of the gifted. A city based on the Golden Rule, where neighbors help out one another, where the community's staple goods are help in common. However, none of the locations these disciples have discovered thus far seem safe enough -- from general discovery, from roving bandits, from the harsh elements. Currently, "Haven" is a tent city in the foothills midway between Hopfrog Butte, Argent Valley, and the encampment of Ghost Hawk's

tribe. They've been hunting and gathering in the area to support themselves, and supplementing that with goods and staples supplied or purchased with funds donated by Reverend Simnul's secret benefactors.

- **Pandora Canyon:** People go in, but don't come out. Huckleberries sleeping within seven miles of it have horrible nightmares. Rumored to be haunted by ghosts, controlled by a huckleberry tribe of Indians, and/or the lair of a bandit gang. May be the secret command post for the aliens among us, examining the results of their genetic meddling, or the hidden prison of the hidden Huckleberry King -- the rumored man blessed with all four gifts, driven mad by his power.

Events & NPC Intersections

Some events and issues over which NPCs could clash:

- **Love Triangle:** Audrey Miller, Ghost Hawk, and the Hopfrog Kid, with Maria Luisa McGee carrying a torch for Nathan.
- **Buried Confederate Gold:** Heartbreaker left it under McGee's farm, Jedediah Warner's heard rumors of it, and Beulah Jamison's discovered clues to its existence.
- **Showdown and Throwdown!:** Krieger Mason has finally tracked down the Rosses to the mouth of Pandora Canyon. So has Buffalo Pete. Unfortunately, Claude Tournette and his half-dozen thugs have been scouting out Pandora Canyon as a new hideout. Hijinks and hot lead ensue!

NPC Interaction Matrix

The NPC Interaction Matrix is a handy tool for determining how NPCs relate to one another. Use of the Matrix can aid in coming up with NPC characterizations, motivations, scenes, and adventures.

<i>towards</i>	AV	DB	GH	HJ	HK	HQ	KM	MLM	SSR
AV feels	x	*	-!	-	-!	+(-!)	*	*	+!
DB feels	*	x	*	-	-	N(+) ⁴	+	+(-)	-!
GH feels	-!	*	x	*	-!	+!	*	N	*
HJ feels	N	-	* ¹	x	*	N	-!	*	+
HK feels	-	-	-!	*	x	+!	N(+)	+	N
HQ feels	N	N(-)	+!	-	+!	x	*	_2	*
KM feels	*	+(-) ³	*	-!	N	*	x	*	-!
MLM feels	*	-	-	*	+!	-!	*	x	*
SSR feels	+!	-!	*	+	N	*	-!	*	x

Notes

¹ Dislikes Indians on principle.

² Normally likes strong women; dislikes that Maria loves the Hopfrog Kid, and that he's friendly with her.

³ Suspicious of Bridgetower.

⁴ Would like to steal her power.

Legend

AV = Professor Anthony Vita
DB = David Bridgetower
GH = Ghost Hawk
HJ = Heartbreaker Jack
HK = The Hopfrog Kid (Nathan Lang)
HQ = The Huckleberry Queen (Audrey Miller)
KM = Marshall Krieger Mason
MLM = Maria Luisa McGee
SSR = Saul & Sara Ross
+ = Likes
+! = Ally
- = Dislikes
-! = Enemy
* = Haven't Met
N = No Opinion
() = Secretly . . .
x = Null Value

Possible Story Arcs

Story arcs -- continuing threads that weave throughout a campaign -- help a game stand out in a player's memory. Here are three story arcs to possibly incorporate into your Psi, Psi West Campaign:

- **Bringing the Iron Horse to Argent Valley:** Every action that Mayor Bridgetower takes should be calculated to help bring a railroad to the town or -- taking a long-range view -- in securing Argent Valley's position as county seat.
- **Old Cowboys Fade Away:** A Tongue of Fire-blessed PC (or NPC ally of one or more of the PCs) dies after a few adventures; luckily, he was projecting himself astrally at the moment of demise (by stray shot, burning building, or rattlesnake/scorpion venom). Over the course of the rest of the campaign, this "ghost" should slowly find his personality worn away and replaced by other people's impressions of what he was like. The "ghost" could find all the skills, memories, and abilities that he doesn't use fading away, only to be replaced with skills, memories, and abilities he never had.
- **Building Haven:** The PCs are introduced to Reverend Simnul early in the campaign are either convinced of his vision or are hired to help create his dream of Haven in reality. This can be a fascinating skeleton of sub-creation for a campaign: dealing with Mayor Bridgetower, Ghost Hawk and his tribe, and the wilderness itself will be adventure in spades.

Genre Advice

The goal genre here is intended to borrow from both the highly charged emotional Spaghetti Westerns (e.g. *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly*) and the iconic, stylized nature of more mainstream Westerns (e.g. *Silverado*). Characters should be constructed with complex personalities around an archetypical seed core -- the weary gunslinger, the smooth gambler, the competent cowboy, the hard-as-nails marshal -- of their role in society. These archetypes should not have their morality "by definition" -- an archetype like "the Strong-Jawed Hero" would end up limiting a player's exploration of the character.

Spins

Depending upon choices made in developing a campaign, Psi, Psi West can take on a patina of Supers, Horror, or even science fiction, especially in terms of Alternate History. Personally, the author's favorite spin is more along the lines of an iconic, fairy-tale Old West in which internal struggles are played out in the form of on-stage action. The watchwords for any Psi, Psi West campaign are simplicity and honesty. If things are simple and honest, the action of the campaign keeps clicking along.

Style Advice

- **Action:** Violence should be raw, explosive, and stylized: clean hits and clean kills, whether from a huckleberry talent or a bullet. Saloon brawls are de rigeur. Action can be large (using the Mustard to collapse a mineshaft, stampeding cattle, a night chase by a lynch mob) or small (a high-stakes poker game, a one-on-one showdown on Main Street, using the Mustard to open a jail cell lock). Keep things moving.
- **Drama:** Just as the camera takes long panoramic shots exploring the landscape in a Western movie, Psi, Psi West game sessions should have its own sweeping and emotional close-ups of each character's personality. For roleplaying and dramatic purposes, these interior explorations can be expressed into action or events in the real world: personify the alcoholic sheriff's past by pulling in an old drinking buddy, confront the bandit's selfishness by raising a "ghost" from his subconscious of someone he feels responsible for, or explore the soiled dove's spoiled childhood by the arrival of her aged family butler. Juxtaposition of a character's goals against another character's allows fascinating examinations of personality and morals.

Theme Advice

A Psi, Psi West Campaign lends itself to a number of richly dramatic themes:

- **Man vs. Man:** At its core, this is the most basic concept. Blondie vs. Angel Eyes; the Lone Ranger vs. Black Bart; Jim & Artie against Miguelito Loveless. For a real treat, oppose people on the same "side": think of stories that have Jim West and the Lone Ranger working at cross-purposes; or a treasure that both Angel Eyes and Black Bart wish to get their hands on.
- **Man vs. Nature:** Pioneering. Survival. Interacting with the natural world. Surviving its challenges. Anything from Grizzly Adams to the Donner Party is fair game here.
- **Order vs. Chaos:** The primal conflict. Justice vs. Greed. Civilization vs. Frontier. Steam Diggers vs. John Henry. For extra amusement, look for match-ups to turn on their head: Civilization (Order) vs. Frontier (Chaos) seems obvious . . . but what would Civilization (Chaos) vs. Frontier (Order) look like? Perhaps a world where the Law of the West is pure, generous, and unsullied, but the Laws of the City are money-grasping, corrupting, and stifling.
- **Divided Loyalties:** Complex and rewarding stories can come out of placing characters in untenable positions. Forced to choose between their family, their beliefs, their history, their friends, their desire to live . . . The choices faced by Will Munny (Clint Eastwood) in *Unforgiven* and Paden (Kevin Kline) in *Silverado* are exemplary for this theme. Watch them!

Opportunities & Pitfalls

With the highly iconic nature of the Western, there are opportunities for increased drama, characterization, wonder, and freedom, all centered around the basic familiarity of the genre. Even those unfamiliar with the history or detail of the period have a general idea of the tropes and characters that roam through the West through cultural osmosis. This is a great strength for a Psi, Psi West campaign, especially as the historical details are relatively unimportant (as presented here).

The addition of psychic powers adds a hook to draw interest for those players who would rather give the genre a pass. Exploration of the meaning and scope of said powers in a reasonable extrapolation of actual Western thought -- especially as regards religious thought, running the gamut from Christianity to Native American beliefs -- could be quite interesting and rewarding. However, the huckleberry gifts should be reflections of a character's personality (much

as gun selection can be, see below); if they become simply tools or weapons to beat up other characters wit, much of the dramatic and emotional potential for the setting will be lost.

Keep a close eye on tone. If the tone is too heroic, you've got superheroes in Stetsons and chaps. Too horrific, you end up with *Deadlands*, Part Deux. Too much science fiction, and the archetypal nature of the genre can become lost in the wild hypotheses and funky gizmos. Of course, you may want to spin your Psi, Psi West Campaign in that manner. Go for it, and caveat lector!

Guns. A character's selection of firearm is an important facet of their personality, and should not be overlooked. The fact that Malachi Johnson (Danny Glover) uses a Henry rifle in *Silverado* is an important aspect of his relationship with his father. The way in which Tuco (Eli Wallach) scratch-builds himself a proper pistol in *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly* demonstrates vividly the hidden brains that this rough, unwashed bandit possesses.

Further Information

Take the time to look at some of these resources, especially in the company of your players. A little bit of common ground can go a long way in setting up and fully engaging in your Psi, Psi West campaign!

Reading

- Card, Orson Scott. *The Tales of Alvin Maker* series (*Seventh Son, Red Prophet, Prentice Alvin, Alvin Journeyman, Heartfire.*) http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/stores/series/-/76/mass_market/002-4598616-8308066
- McCulley, Johnston. [*The Mark of Zorro.*](#)
- Sumner, Mark. [*Devil's Tower.*](#)
- Welch, James. [*Fools Crow.*](#)
- Whalen, John. [*The Big Book of the Weird Wild West.*](#)

Viewing

- [*The Good, the Bad, & the Ugly.* \(1966\).](#)
- [*Hang 'Em High* \(1967\).](#)
- [*High Plains Drifter.* \(1972\).](#)
- [*The Mark of Zorro.* \(1920\).](#)
- [*The Mask of Zorro.* \(1998\).](#)
- [*Silverado.* \(1985\).](#)
- [*Tombstone.* \(1993\).](#)
- [*Unforgiven.* \(1992\).](#)
- [*Wild, Wild West \[TV\].* \(1965-70\).](#)
- [*Wild, Wild West \[movie\].* \(1999\).](#)

*Wounds Unlimited and Steve Jackson Games are proud to announce the winner of the **Ogre Scenario Design Contest**: "Hammer & Anvil." Look for this scenario, and others, in **Ogre Scenario Book One**, available in December!*

Hammer & Anvil

A Scenario for the Classic *OGRE* Map

by Alvin Helms

([Click here](#) for the accompanying map to this scenario!)

This scenario might also be called "Kill the Ogre," for it is the counterpoint to the traditional "Kill the Command Post" scenario. It depicts an attempt by mixed forces to ambush and destroy an Ogre by making use of the Ogre's well-known appetite for Command Posts.

The scenario derives its name from a classic military maneuver, in which an advancing enemy is allowed to pass a screen of concealed forces, then is confronted with a main force. The enemy's retreat is cut off by the emergence of the concealed forces, and it may, with luck, be crushed between the two.

"Hammer & Anvil" may be played with nothing more than the units and rules available in *Deluxe OGRE* and *Deluxe G.E.V.*

1.0 Basic Scenario Setup

In the "Hammer & Anvil" scenario, the long map edges (*01** and 15***) are impassable to anything but Infantry. The map might therefore represent a pass through a steep-walled valley, with the only route of escape to the south (***22*), through the clear area. The northern edge (***01*) only leads deeper into enemy territory.

The ambushing forces consist of:

- 1 Command Post (decoy)
- 12 Infantry squads
- 16 Armor Units (no stationary Howitzers)

The target is a lone Ogre Mk III.

1.1 Initial Placement of Forces

The specific placement of units is very important in the "Hammer & Anvil" scenario, and the first turn consists only of placement, not movement (*see 5.0 Strategy*).

1.11 Setting the Bait

The ambushing player begins by placing his Command Post anywhere within the area shaded blue in the map illustration. He must then select one of his Armor Units (of any type) and place it anywhere within the same area. This ends his placement turn, and these are the only units visible to the Ogre before his placement.

1.12 Responding to the Bait

The Ogre's player must now place his Ogre anywhere within the diamond of hexes shaded red in the map illustration. He may then fire any or all of its weapons at either or both of the targets visible to him, provided they are in range.

1.2 Springing the Trap

After the Ogre has fired, the rest of the ambushing player's other forces come out of concealment by entering along the map edges, with the following constraints:

At least one third of the ambusher's Armor must enter through the northern edges of the map (*hexes 0102 through 0107, hexes 1502 through 1507, and any hex in the **01 or **02 range*).

All remaining Armor must be divided equally between the southeast and southwest edges (*hexes 0109 through 0122 and hexes 1509 through 1522*).

NOTE: *The Victory Point value of any unit(s) used as Bait is not included in the total of the forces when dividing between northern and southern armor groups.*

All Infantry must enter with the southern Armor, along the SE and SW edges of the map.

None of the ambusher's units may enter through the southern edge of the map. (*The available entry hexes are colored yellow in the map illustration.*)

No more than one Armor unit (or three Infantry squads, grouped into a platoon) may enter through each hex. If stacking is permitted, it may only be done *after* entering the map.

NOTE: *These units are executing movement, coming from hiding places just beyond the edges of the map. Therefore, a Heavy Tank entering at hex 0112 could move as far as 0311 in this turn.*

Once all the ambusher's units have finished their movement (including the Bait unit, if it survived), the ambusher may attack with any units in range of the Ogre. GEVs may then take their second movement phase.

Thereafter, it is the Ogre player's turn, and all play proceeds normally.

2.0 Objectives and Victory Conditions

The game ends when the Ogre is destroyed or when the Ogre exits the map -- which he may do along its southern edge only, going back the way he came.

The ambusher's objective is to destroy the Ogre with a minimum of casualties. For the Ogre, the objective is to escape -- and to destroy as many of its attackers as possible. All normal Victory Points apply (2 per Infantry Squad, 6 per Armor Unit, etc.), and are used to calculate the following Victory Conditions:

Ogre destroyed and 60% or more of the ambusher's forces survive:	<i>Complete Ambush Victory</i>
Ogre destroyed and 40% or more of the ambusher's forces survive:	<i>Ambush Victory</i>
Ogre destroyed and 20% or more of the ambusher's forces survive:	<i>Marginal Ambush Victory</i>
Ogre destroyed but less than 20% of ambusher's forces survive:	<i>Draw</i>
Ogre escapes but destroys less than 25% of ambusher's forces:	<i>Draw</i>
Ogre escapes and destroys at least 25% of ambusher's forces:	<i>Marginal Ogre Victory</i>
Ogre escapes and destroys at least 50% of ambusher's forces:	<i>Ogre Victory</i>
Ogre escapes and destroys at least 75% of ambusher's forces:	<i>Complete Ogre Victory</i>

2.1 Special Victory Rule: Rewarding Spite

If the Ogre destroys the Command Post decoy, he is awarded the value of two Armor Units (12 Victory Points). This is added to the ambusher's V.P. total when calculating the percentage destroyed by the Ogre, but it is *not* included in calculating the ambusher's survival total. The bonus may therefore break a Draw or upgrade an Ogre Victory, but will not otherwise affect the outcome.

2.2 What If . . . ?

It is not likely, but it *is* possible for the Ogre to become immobilized, yet destroy all its attackers. Should this happen, consider it a Draw -- unless the Ogre also destroyed the Command Post decoy, in which case it is a Marginal Ogre Victory.

3.0 Advanced Scenario

Play is identical to the Basic Scenario, except:

The ambusher's forces consist of:

- 1 Command Post (decoy)
- 18 Infantry squads
- 24 Armor Units (no stationary Howitzers)

The target is a lone Ogre Mk V.

4.0 Optional Rules

These variations will add some spice to "Hammer & Anvil."

4.1 The Secret Weapon

The ambusher may exchange two of his Armor Units for a Howitzer, which his combat engineers have concealed within one of the map's 17 craters. He must choose the crater during his Initial Placement, but its position is not revealed until the trap is sprung (*see 1.2*). Once revealed, the Howitzer fires along with the ambusher's other units.

The concealed Howitzer derives some protection from the crater: Because it is inside a crater, it may not be overrun, and the shelter gives it a Defense rating of 2, rather than the usual 1.

NOTE: To avoid mistrust between players, the ambusher should record the Howitzer's location beforehand, by writing the hex's number on a slip of paper. The slip should be left in plain sight, face down or folded, and should not be touched by either player until after the Ogre has been placed.

4.11 Waiting for the Shot

If the Ogre is not within range of the Howitzer at the end of the Initial Placement, the ambusher need not reveal it yet. It may remain concealed until the Ogre comes within its range, and be revealed during the ambusher's movement phase.

4.12 The TOP SECRET Weapon

The ambusher may instead exchange FOUR Armor Units for an Emplaced Howitzer with Point Defense (*Attack 6*,

Range 6 hexes/12", Defense 5 + 1 for the crater).

4.2 More Bait for the Hook

The ambusher may choose to roll a die to determine the number of "bait" units (see 1.11) that were necessary to lure the Ogre in. Regardless of the number, *all* of the "bait" units must be placed in the northern end of the map (*along the **07 line of hexes or above*). As in the standard rules, the Victory Point value of the Bait is not counted with the total when dividing between northern & southern armor groups.

When using this rule, the Ogre player may follow his placement with a Move -- so long as no part of it takes the Ogre southward -- followed as normal by firing.

5.0 Strategy

The placement phase of "Hammer & Anvil" is more important than one might realize. Although the Ogre's only objective is to escape, it *must* engage the enemy to get more than a draw. Yet the longer it stays, the greater its chances of never leaving-- for it faces more firepower than in "Kill the Command Post." The forces and starting positions of each side have been planned to offer each side roughly equal chances of success, assuming each player places and moves wisely . . .

5.1 Ambush Strategy

Use only GEVs in the northern Armor group. The Ogre will most likely bolt southward, and the northern units will need to move fast to catch it. (And if it doesn't run, it'll be trying to remove the northern Armor first -- so you'll need the speed to avoid it until reinforcements arrive from the south.)

It is vital to slow the Ogre's movement, so target only its tread units at first. Once it has been slowed, you may remove the weapons in order of priority.

Remember that you *must* destroy the Ogre to win, but the survival of your own forces is secondary. If necessary, sacrifice units by placing them in the Ogre's path, in order to take out tread units in overrun combat.

5.2 Ogre Strategy

There are two basic approaches: Cautious and Bold.

In the Cautious approach, the Ogre (perhaps smelling something fishy) ignores the Bait and places in the bottom half of the Kill Zone. Immediately run straight for the southern border. Make no diversions, and pick off ambushers as they come near you. If you make it to the border with at least two movement points left, wait around and pick off some more.

In the Bold approach the Ogre *takes* the Bait, placing at the sides or northern edge of the Kill Zone and charging to the attack. If enough damage can be done to the ambushers quickly, they may lack the firepower to prevent escape. When using the Bold approach, make certain that you destroy the Command Post.

Cthulhu-Fu

Martial Arts in *Call of Cthulhu*

by Shane Ivey

The martial arts rules in *Call of Cthulhu* have always been cursory, and with good reason. *Call of Cthulhu* isn't *Feng Shui*. It's a game of mystery and horror, better suited to bespectacled intellectuals than Jackie Chan wannabes. And in 1920s-era *Call of Cthulhu*, martial arts are rare in Western civilization to begin with; of the oriental martial arts, only judo had any following among white Americans. But with modern-day *Call of Cthulhu*, martial arts become more prominent: every sort of martial arts training is commonplace, and they become more and more useful for investigators - especially given the severe consequences that can attend simply shooting every cultist in sight. In *Delta Green*, they're inevitable.

The fact is, fights happen. Sure, the really gruesome horrors are far beyond the ken and caliber of even the hardest Marine, but the nasty cultists that worship those horrors are not. The players are sometimes going to welcome that small relief against the eldritch terrors waiting to blast their sanity to gibbering bits. And in *Delta Green*, most agents are either cops or spies who ought to have some training in taking the human terrors on.

With that in mind, these rules are meant to expand unarmed combat in *Call of Cthulhu*, the martial arts skill in particular, making it a little more flexible, flavorful, and interesting, and hopefully even helping the Keeper and players to portray hand-to-hand fights with a little more verisimilitude.

(And Keeper, don't worry. We all know that big 2D6 kick still won't do jack against the shoggoth in the basement.)

Martial Arts Effects

There are numerous martial arts subskills, each representing a distinct style of unarmed combat training (see below). You should treat martial arts like any skill group, such as languages or crafts or art: there are many distinct skills which fall under the same category (Martial Arts (karate), Martial Arts (judo), Martial Arts (aikido), and so on), and each must be developed separately.

Each subskill, or style, offers advantages in a few of the following skills. The effect of martial arts varies with the attack or skill being performed.

Fist/Punch, Kick, or Head Butt: If the attack roll is also a successful martial arts skill roll, the base damage of the unarmed attack is doubled (i.e., a punch attack does 2D3 rather than 1D3). If an unarmed parry roll is also a successful martial arts skill roll, the parry will affect a melee weapon attack.

Grapple: The martial arts skill can be used in place of the character's STR vs. STR resistance roll when attempting to maintain or escape from a hold. When used to harm the target, if the grapple roll is also a successful martial arts skill roll, the base damage is doubled to 2D6. Alternately, the martial arts skill rating can be used in place of the character's grapple skill rating, with the same limitations as for Fist/Punch, Kick, or Head Butt.

Dodge: If the dodge roll is also a successful martial arts skill roll, the character can take a melee attack action in the same round as the dodge. (The character still cannot launch a ranged attack and dodge in the same round.)

Weapon Skill (varies with style): The martial arts skill can be used in place of the character's attack and parry skill with a designated weapon. The chance of an impale is not affected, and the character cannot obtain an experience check in the weapon skill if the martial arts skill rating is used instead. Note that this effect only applies to melee weapons, not to unarmed attack skills.

Non-Weapon Skill (varies with style): The martial arts skill can be used in place of the the character's normal rating with the designated skill. The character cannot obtain an experience check in the in the skill if the martial arts skill rating is used instead.

Martial Arts Styles and Skills

Aikido Dodge Grapple Weapon: Knife	Boxing Fist/Punch Dodge Head Butt	Capoeira Kick Dodge Skill: Jump
Filipino Kali Fist/Punch Kick Weapon: Knife	Jiu-Jitsu Grapple Dodge Weapon: Knife	Judo Grapple Dodge Fist/Punch
Karate Fist/Punch Kick Head Butt	Kendo Fist/Punch Kick Weapon: Sword	Kickboxing Fist/Punch Dodge Fist
Kung Fu Fist/Punch Kick Weapon: Club	Savate Fist/Punch Dodge Kick	Special Forces Training Fist/Punch Grapple Weapon: Knife

Example: Agent Marlow has Martial Arts (aikido) at 62%, Grapple at 69%, Dodge at 50%, and Knife skill at base. Using his Martial Arts (aikido) skill, he can make knife attacks or parries at 62% (but his chance of an impale remains 5%, from his 25% skill). If his grapple attack roll is also a successful martial arts roll, he can inflict double damage with a successful grapple attack. And he can use his martial arts skill to always have a 62% chance of escaping a grapple hold, even against an opponent of much higher Strength. Because his martial arts skill is higher than his dodge skill, any time he makes a successful dodge he can still launch a melee attack in the same round. However, his high aikido skill gives him no advantage in launching punches, kicks, or head butts.

But What About [insert your favorite style here]?

Obviously, the chart above is not meant to be comprehensive. If you want to have a character be an expert in some other form of martial arts, feel free to make it up on the spot based on the most prominent characteristics of the style. To keep things more or less balanced, restrict the effects to three distinct skills, as in the styles above. Give it a name, pick three skills, and you're set.

A Word About Damage

Because hands and feet simply lack the deadly penetrating power of knives and crowbars, This article recommends using the "subdual attack" rules in *Call of Cthulhu* as the default for unarmed attacks, but with a twist: any "special success" unarmed attack (i.e., an attack which would be an impale with an impaling weapon) inflicts full damage, not subdual damage. This allows for the crippling and killing trauma that *can* be done hand to hand, without ensuring that every fistfight leaves a character in traction, or every foot is as good as a .45.

Of course, it won't bother that shoggoth much either way. But won't you breathe a little easier when that security guard

takes you on?

Pyramid Review

Magic Handbook (for the DC Universe RPG)

Written by Fred Jandt, Scott McCullar, Jim Spivey, and Nikola Vrtis

Published by [West End Games](#)

128 pages; \$17.00

Magic has always been a strange duck in the Supers genre.

Sure, magic has been a constant presence in the comics; Dr. Fate & the Spectre were present in the 1940s, Zatanna hung out with the JLA, and Dr. Strange has always been available as an occult consultant for Marvel's assembled heroes.

But they've never quite fit in. Laser helmet wielding villains, galactic planet eaters, and wheelchair bound telepathic visionaries are all "standard" enough, but magicians tend to be somewhat outside of the standard super heroic box.

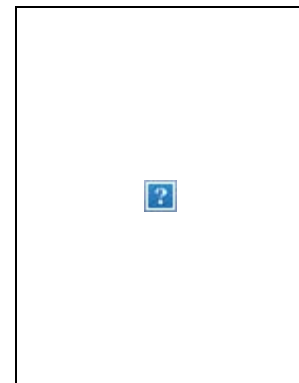
In superhero RPGs, magic is usually given a cursory treatment in the main book, and gets a big 'ol supplement later on. The 1980s *Marvel Superheroes Game* had its *Realms of Magic* supplement, which was an outstanding sourcebook on mysticism. Mayfair's *DC Heroes* had the excellent *Magic* sourcebook by Daniel Greenberg.

Now, West End Games has produced a supplement for their *DC Universe RPG* called, simply enough, *The Magic Handbook*. Like its predecessor, it expands on the use and role of magic in the DC Universe. But it's got a bit of a flaw. Due to a licensing quirk, WEG doesn't have the rights to cover the Vertigo line of comics. That means that this sourcebook doesn't cover, say, John Constantine, Swamp Thing, or The Sandman. This is an inconvenience, but thankfully it doesn't render the book useless (unless, of course, you're only looking for stats for John Constantine, Swamp Thing, or The Sandman).

The book starts out by detailing mechanical ways you can use magic in a DCU game. There are three ways: characters use magic, characters are "empowered" by magic, and characters use magic items. The first 30 pages are concerned with the creation of magic-using characters. The Magic Manipulation power from the base game is expanded into Wizardry and Sorcery. Wizardry is the heroic brand of magic use, and Sorcery is the villainous version, because it's harder to use Wizardry if you've got Hero points, and harder to use Sorcery if you've got Villain points. Wizardry has a slightly higher learning curve; Sorcerers get powers earlier (Magic Blast is acquired at 3D for Sorcerers, 5D for Wizards), but that's because they're just up to no good.

There's also a variety of magical enhancements and limitations for characters and powers. Curiously, there were a few places where non-cannonical examples were used instead of DC Universe ones. Magical Transformation uses "Kris's character," who must exclaim "Groovy!" to gain his super strength. Now, but isn't there already a superhero who has a really cool Magical Transformation, triggered by a magical word? Lightning bolts & inter-religious acronyms? You know who I mean. World's mightiest mortal? If you're going to get the license, you might as well use it, eh?

The following chapter gives specifics to creating spells. In this chapter there were some unrecognized power limitations; it's presumed they are from some of the other sourcebooks referenced, but if so it probably would have been appropriate to have the non-basic rules ones refer back to the book of their origin. Later on, there's a chapter which gives rules for constructing supernatural characters. There are packages for Jinni, werewolves, vampires, and members of the mystical Homo Magi race, among others.



The book is primarily concerned with magical Locations & characters. Locations are organized in alphabetical order, with a few of their related signature characters included in that section. Heaven and Hell are included, and give packages for playing Angelic and Demonic characters of various types.

There are a few strange selections. The entire Marvel family is included with the Rock of Eternity, which isn't totally illogical as their stats get a bit of a tweak with the rules included in this book (the Legion of Superheroes Marvel Family member is omitted). But Raven and Trigon get not a mention in the Azarath entry, and I wouldn't mind seeing how they're built in the latest rules incarnation.

Some details aren't quite consistent; Amethyst's character stats says "these characteristics are for Amethyst before she merged with Gemworld," but the character history mentions no merging with Gemworld.

It is interesting to note that the DC Universe has somehow managed to merge the Judeo-Christian-Islamic God with their cosmology, including the vast panoply of other deities. Apparently, the "capital G" God is The Presence (I swear, you miss *one* issue, you miss everything). There are a number of interesting developments that spring from this particular revelation, including how The Spectre's original mission as "The Wrath of God" was made obsolete "in the wake of the birth and passion of Jesus Christ, who brought to the world a more compassionate way of living." I don't know the full background of the DCU's revision of The Spectre, but it's certainly interesting to see it listed in an RPG. I don't recall seeing a character who's been rewritten to reflect religious dogma before.

The chapter on characters is fairly exhaustive, covering characters from Arrakhat to Zatara. There's a good section on Dr. Fate, looking at iterations of the character throughout his history.

The book suffers from a lack of referencing to its original source material. The original Magic supplement for DCH was intensely footnoted, referring back to the original material it was referencing. This book lacks any such references. It's not something that's normally expected of a comic book RPG supplement, but footnoting can be very useful, for both die-hard fans and occasional readers alike.

The book presents a very thorough overview of the magic-wielders of the *DC Universe*, as thorough as the authors could be under the restraints of their license. It is the last word on magic within the *DC Universe*, so if you want to include magic and magicians in a *DCU* game beyond the basic Magic Manipulation power, this is the place to go.

--Justin Mohareb

Pyramid Review

History of the World Game

Published by [Avalon Hill](#)

Designed by Steve Kendall and Gary Dicken

Boxed set; \$44.00

History of the World is Avalon Hill's latest deluxe remake of one of their older classics. Like their recent rereleases of *Cosmic Encounter*, *Acquire*, and *Diplomacy*, they've streamlined the rules and replaced the cardboard chits with high-quality plastic pieces.

History of the World is a cousin to world-conquest games like *Risk*. The object of the game is to have the most number of points at the end of the game. Points are earned by occupying and conquering territories, and building cities and monuments.

There are several unique features in *History of the World* that separate it from more traditional conquer-the-world boardgames. As its title implies, the game spans thousands of years. The entirety of the game lasts seven turns, each of which represents an "Epoch" of several hundred years. At the beginning of each Epoch, players draw cards indicating the empire they will play on their turn. So, at the beginning of the game, players compete with the Sumerians and Egyptians, progress to the Ming Dynasty, Greeks, and Romans in the mid-game, and finish with the United States and Britain colonizing the world. In an interesting twist, players in last place always get to draw Empire Cards first, giving them the opportunity to pass weaker empires (like the Aztecs, the Guptas, or the Netherlands) to the leaders.

There is no movement in the game. Once your empire is placed on the board, and expands by conquering nearby territories, that empire is never touched again. While it still earns points as long as it survives, it will slowly be devoured by future empires, big and small. Players can try to guarantee their old empires survival by building forts or keeping them contained within well-defended borders. But even the most well-fortified empire will crumble in time.

Additionally, players are dealt ten event cards, which range from disasters and revolts to elite troops and minor empires. Using these cards at the right time is a key strategy in the game.

The game mechanics are very simple, and clearly explained in the rulebook. Attackers roll two dice to the defender's one. The highest single die wins the combat. Defenders roll an additional die in rough terrain; forts and event cards can further modify the dice. In a welcome change from the last edition, ties destroy both attacker and defender, which helps speed the game along.

Speed, however, is still the game's greatest weakness. *History of the World* is a long game. A full, six-player game can last 4-5 hours, though experienced players can cut this time down by an hour or so. While Avalon Hill has done their best to quicken the pace of the game by streamlining the rules (they've eliminated sea combat, and lands can now only contain a single army), it's not a game that you can easily play in a night after work. Gaming groups with indecisive players, or ones that need to carefully calculate their points each turn, be warned! In its favor, *History of the World* is a well-balanced game. Even players who get all their forces eliminated can rest assured that they'll be back the next turn in greater force, and have a plenty of opportunity to gain ground.

The game can be played with four or less players, but it loses some of its charm. The board does not fill up as quickly, as several empires go missing, and players may find they have no one to attack on their turn.

Like all of Hasbro's recent releases, the components are marvelous. Each Epoch has its own set of plastic army pieces

(700 in total!), so the Minoans from Epoch I are easily distinguishable from the Mongols of Epoch III, and the British from Epoch VII. Forts, cities, capitals, and monuments also have gorgeous plastic renditions. The mounted board is colorful and easy to read, and the cards and markers are made from sturdy stock.

History of the World is a good addition to the growing Hasbro/Avalon Hill family. It's simple enough that gamers only familiar with Risk or Axis & Allies can get the hang of it right away. Its unique take on conquest is clever, and it even proves educational to people with a passing interest in the empires of the world.

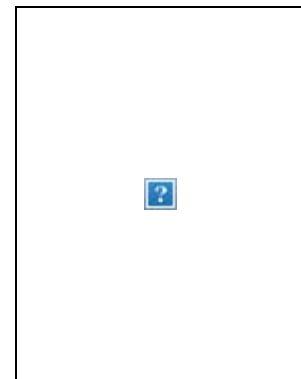
--*J.C. Connors*

Pyramid Review

Earthdawn: Second Edition

Published by [Living Room Games](#)

352 page softcover; \$30.00



FASA published the original *Earthdawn* game in 1993, and it developed a dedicated core of players who admired its well thought out world and intelligent mechanics. When FASA ended the line, a group of these players purchased the rights to publish new materials for the game: an uncommon act of devotion meant to save their favorite game setting from extinction. After producing two other well-received supplements for the game, Living Room Games has finally released a *Second Edition* of the main rules.

At first glance the book is an impressive piece of work for such a small game company; the interior art is good, the layout is clean, if simple, and the text is easy to read. It isn't until one looks closer that minor complaints arise. Living Room Games makes extensive use of the original artwork, while adding new art throughout the book. While each individual piece is good, the new artwork's cleaner comic book style never meshes with the darker, more evocative, original art. The color plates from the first edition are not included, a perfectly understandable business decision, but I do miss them. The main artistic improvement is the new cover -- it isn't inspired, but at least it looks like the cover to a fantasy game (with the obligatory cheesecake female in a Princess Leia on Tattooine outfit), something the first edition cover never managed. Like the art, much of the text is taken directly from the earlier edition. Again, this is a good business decision as the original edition text was successful in drawing the reader into *Earthdawn*'s unique environment. Unfortunately, this could turn off older players, making rules changes hard to find and making the product feel more like a second printing than a second edition. Finally, there are a few editorial mistakes, including the dread "Page XX." Despite these minor complaints, the book is well laid out and intelligently written.

The book makes no great changes to Barsaive, the default setting, and admirably explains this vibrant world. Barsaive is a model of world building, giving perfectly logical reasons for traditional fantasy monsters to lurk side by side with Lovecraftian Horrors in vast underground complexes filled with traps and treasure. If dungeons aren't your style, the player characters are meant to be heroes both reclaiming their world from a magical apocalypse and stopping wars between the Dwarvish kingdom, the tainted Elvish empire, the Orkish homeland and Troll raiders with the airborne longships. Looking for politics? Merchant companies struggle against one another for trade routes and political factions strive for control as the shadow of a slave-driven empire looms to the south, planning their conquest of all of Barsaive. Gamers would be hard pressed to exhaust the promise of the setting in a decade of playing. The *Second Edition* updates the background data to incorporate previous campaign supplements from both FASA and Living Room Games. I have two complaints about this: first, doing so acts as a spoiler to newcomers who might want to play those supplements, and second these changes are not always followed through in the text reprinted from first edition, leading to examples of play that include major NPCs now long dead.

Mechanically, *Earthdawn* is based around a flexible universal mechanic. Everything is rated in Steps, and each step has dice associated with it. Those dice will, on average, roll the step number (giving players a good gauge of their ability), but are open-ended high, and re-rolls can produce incredible successes. The number rolled is compared to the action's difficulty, with a table providing a degree of success if necessary. Combat has several steps, but easily handles armor defeating hits and knockdowns, with logical rules for mounted and unarmed combat, disarming, going inside a shield and other maneuvers. The magic system is as complex as combat, but just as logical and versatile, giving spell-casting characters plenty of options.

Like the world, the mechanics directly justify fantasy gaming norms. For example, the player characters are all Adepts -- heroes following a single profession through a regularly defined progression of levels and possessing degrees of skill that normal people simply cannot reach. All of the things that *AD&D* players debated are built directly into the

world. An Adept's powers come from devotion to a life-philosophy, called a Discipline, and the more they embody that Discipline the more powerful they become. Rather than evading the need for game-balancing mechanics, the world and mechanics support one another. The new edition doesn't have many rules changes, but they are all improvements: an expansion of the sparse skills system is well done and long overdue, some of the disciplines have their powers reorganized or modified to improve play balance, the new rules make it harder for characters to learn additional disciplines, and so on. The book also includes rules that once appeared only in sourcebooks, making the *Second Edition* a more useful reference than the first.

Despite all of the well-deserved praise I can heap on the game's setting and mechanics, I fear that this new edition may be too little, too late. When *Earthdawn* first appeared in 1993, the bloom had come off the rose of *AD&D* 2nd edition and the market was more receptive to a new take on heroic fantasy with mechanics that fixed many of *AD&D*'s sacred cows. *Earthdawn Second Edition* is entering an entirely different marketplace, in direct competition with a streamlined, improved, and aggressively marketed *Dungeons & Dragons*. Players picking it up for the first time will wonder why they didn't just market the world as a *d20* supplement, while core veteran players are already starting the "All Rules Changes Are Bad" argument on discussion boards. The rules changes are not great enough or essential enough to attract veteran players, and the book is coming out in the wake of the *D&D* Juggernaut.

Still, if you are looking for a well thought-out world for heroic fantasy of any flavor and are looking for something slightly different than the ubiquitous *d20* mechanics, *Earthdawn Second Edition* is an excellent choice. The rulebook is a value at \$30, it contains everything you need to play, and any errors it has are relatively minor. There is already a sizable amount of support material, and if Living Room Games continues their current trend, the future releases will be of impressive quality. It's obvious that they love the game, and after reading the *Second Edition* rulebook it's easy to understand why.

--Brian Rogers

After-Action Report: My *Unknown Armies* Game

"Ken, your big city frightens me. I want to go back home to my jumped-up lumber port."

-- John Tynes

It's time once more for a brief sidestep into the specific, the nitty-gritty of campaign design, this time courtesy of my own now-completed *Unknown Armies* campaign. (I'll try to keep the *UA*-specific material down to a bare minimum, for people who aren't up on the setting. But see [my Pyramid Pick](#), if you're curious.) Consider this an example of [urban fantasy](#), an exercise in [illumination](#), and another [cheap excuse](#) to tell war stories. Hopefully, though, a look into my own GMing brain will help provide an example of Applied Suppressed Transmission-style Secret History, recast in urban concrete for your examination.

My *Unknown Armies* game ran an illuminated 23 months, from July of 1999 to June of 2001. Seven players and I met every Monday night for about four hours at a stretch to rebuild the magical infrastructure of Chicago. The players determined their "narrative structure" -- who they were, and why they all hang out together -- and decided to play the Occult Establishment, rather than the Plucky Rebels, Fearless Monster-Hunters, or Accidentally-Involved Normals. Based on their decision, I worked up the "Auriga Society"; the secret society which has, for over a century, been working to Ascend the city of Chicago as the New Jerusalem, the Holy City, the Shining City On A Hill. Then, I wrote up a basic player knowledge handout, which you can read [here](#), and we got down to it. By the way, the [Hotel Inter-Continental](#) is a real place, as were 99% of the locations in the game. And, in an example of the kind of disturbing synchronicity that haunted the whole campaign, I selected it before I knew about the [King Arthur Court](#) banquet room.

"But for the purposes of my work, especially plotting it, and outlining it, it's real valuable to think: 'Nothing is a coincidence. Everything contains a message. There are no random events, no coincidences. And whatever someone really means, it's not what they just said . . . Even when I'm dealing with real history, I can arrange our perspective on it and emphasize some bits and kind of shadow out other bits, so it seems that real history illustrates my point, that it really is arranged with some structure in mind, rather than just all tumbling around like gravel down a hillside.'"

-- Tim Powers, *Locus* interview (March, 1998)

I began my initial design for the game on an airplane in February of 1999. Looking at my first campaign design sheet, I seem to have started on the assumption that the Invisible Clergy and the Olympian Gods were the same thing, and that Chicago (the city of Hephaistos) would be dueling other cities, and that Hephaistos and Zeus were warring for Chicago itself. Once the players picked their storyline, though, I decided to junk the front-row presence of the gods, and got into the nitty-gritty of urban history research. As I began sifting through the books, I began to notice some patterns developing; the game became about Chicago's history intersecting with its future. A few examples of how my research tweaked the game, and vice versa:

- **The Hancock Building:** The ultimate expression of Chicago's modernist International-Style aesthetic, and a ready-made Dark Tower. It's the World's Largest Trapezohedron (for that Lovecraftian touch), rising on the site of Anton LaVey's birthplace. I put the Hancock under the control of the Death-Goddess, the Avatar of the Crone. Eventually, she became the main villain of the game, I think because she had that whole Maleficent vibe going for her.
- **Neo-Situationist International:** If the players were Order, they needed Chaos to oppose them. While researching Chicago occultists, I discovered a number of references to Chicago as "the new Babylon" -- which was coincidentally, it turns out, a project of the political-artistic movement Situationism. (This was just a Google search on "New Babylon" that hit [pay dirt](#).) I couldn't have invented a better archenemy for the old-school Auriga Society, and it let me do a lot of Grant Morrison-style riffs to counterpoint my Alan Moore-style urban [sacred geometry](#). The PCs hated the NSI so much, though, that they smashed them to pieces before all the Really Wack Stuff got to happen -- but them's the breaks.
- **John Wellborn Root:** One of the greatest early Chicago architects; I originally intended him to be the great Founding Father and hero of the PCs. While running the game's setup, I discovered that he had died mysteriously while re-designing the Chicago World's Fair of 1893 to conform with "Egyptian principles."

(Daniel Burnham took over, and designed it in faultless neo-Classical style, instead.) This is the kind of thing that sometimes makes even me nervous -- but it gave me the key mechanic by which the Auriga Society had tried to Ascend Chicago; sacred architecture in the World's Fairs. Intriguingly, Root's son, John Wellborn Root Jr., put a statue of Ceres on top of the Board of Trade building (for 30 years the tallest building in Chicago), which let me add the other aspects of the Goddess to the game and complement the Hancock's Crone.

- **Charles Tyson Yerkes:** The man who built Chicago's elevated network had to leave town in 1899 ahead of an indictment for massive corruption. He made a great "mysterious renegade" for the game, given my decision to make the El tracks essentially ley lines. When I found out he fled to London -- where he consolidated and designed the London Underground! -- I decided he'd defected to British cliomancer Angela Forsythe, and the British occultists became another enemy. (I also discovered that a special El car used to ferry corpses to local funeral homes, at night, along what's now the Brown Line. From that seed, I developed the Black Line, a magical El line that ran into the Land of the Dead.)
- **Whitechapel Club of Chicago:** I'd already decided that "John Doyle Stephensen" would be [Jack the Ripper](#). I discovered, however, that there was a group of Ripperologists called the Chicago Whitechapel Society active in the 1890s -- suddenly, I decided that the Ripper had brought something *important* with him to Chicago, and started the Chicago-London feud I'd already worked Yerkes into. I tied the Ripper connection into [H.H. Holmes](#): I figured the Auriga Society must have built his Murder Castle as a kind of "toxic waste dump" for Chicago's evil ley energies.
- **Samuel Insull:** Founder of Chicago's Commonwealth Edison company, he was Edison's London accountant until he suddenly moved to America in 1892. He built the Chicago Civic Opera House, had a stripper wife ("Little Venus") who hated him (making him a great Hephaistos avatar), and generally tied into a lot of archetypal themes. Apparently, he kept Edison's books in code, and brought them with him to Chicago -- after Yerkes left, he took over a number of Yerkes' transit lines. More grist for my London vs. Chicago mill.
- **Noah's Ark:** From Tim Powers' *Declare* (and later research) I learned that a mad Chaldean Archbishop climbed Mt. Ararat in 1888 and found Noah's Ark there -- which he tried to raise funds to bring to the World's Parliament of Religions at (wait for it) the 1893 Chicago World's Fair! It was the work of a moment to decide that he secretly brought the Ark here, where the Auriga Society used its timbers to make the first Ferris Wheel (of Fortune, for Tarot fans). This made a great major artifact for the PCs to discover.

"Make no little plans; they have no magic to stir men's blood, and probably themselves will not be realized. Make big plans: aim high in hope and work, remembering that a noble, logical diagram, once recorded, will never die, but long after we are gone will be a living thing, asserting itself with ever growing insistency. Remember that our sons and grandsons are going to do things that would stagger us. Let your watch-word be order and your beacon beauty."

-- Daniel Burnham, 1909 *Plan For Chicago*

Those are only a few of the amazingly cool things I discovered just reading Chicago history books. Anything, I've mentioned before, is weird if you look at it right. The key is to have a backstory so that you narrow down your embarrassments of riches. Between sacred architecture, the London-Chicago occult war, the Triple Goddess, and the Neo-Situationists, I had a hook on which to hang any historical fact I could find. Once one player picked the Avatar of the True King as his character, my new story arc came built in with Frazerian "sacred king" goodness (a la *Last Call* -- this was a very Tim Powers game). Rather than use the World's Fairs, the renewed Auriga Society would make their True King first the King of Chicago, and then the King of America. This also helped keep the game centered on the players.

They immediately took to the theme of history vs. destiny; almost all the players picked characters with historical family ties to Chicago's occult power structure. Interweaving their fictional families and my fictional weirdness with the real Chicago aristocracy was easily done: from the bizarre murder of Marshall Field III to Colonel McCormick's habit of stealing stones from famous buildings, I had plenty of weird material. And since the PCs' lineages held important revelations about their own present, I could count on the players to write half my background for me. (It helps that I have great players -- but that always helps.) You haven't lived as a GM until a player has asked "I want to run a character who's under his grandfather's blood curse, but doesn't know it -- is that okay?"

Of course, letting the players co-create runs its own risks -- after I revealed that the "orphaned" True King was actually (secretly) John Wellborn Root IV, he rejected Root's "Egyptian principles" and wrecked a whole subplot

centering on "Little Egypt" (both a region of southern Illinois, and a stripper at that ever-wonderful 1893 World's Fair), Memphis, Tennessee, and the blues. On the other hand, one PC wanted to build an [Influencing Engine](#) (before the player knew what one was), which let me tie in more sacred geometry (he found a Babbage Engine working on ley magic), and strengthened the nascent London-Chicago war (because Angela Forsythe still had the Influencing Mills that Yerkes had stolen back). The British connection also let me work in the [Monster of Glamis](#) as the True King of Britain, and let the PCs use [Shakespearean dramaturgy](#) to overthrow him (in a ritual staging of *Richard II* in London's Hyde Park -- also the name of a neighborhood in Chicago).

Which is a good general theme of any deeply weird game -- play what you know. I don't actually know an awful lot about Capone and gangland Chicago, so I underplayed that -- I know a lot about architecture, so I played up Frank Lloyd Wright (another Hephaistos figure, cursed by fire) and Daniel Burnham (in my game a powerful ley magician, and in real life a Swedenborgian who talked with angels). My players kept up like champions, and really did a lot of the fictional development themselves; they didn't drown in the backstory, because they helped create it. Since I had a very busy Chicago, I didn't have to force the players to interact with something they found boring, or bring back a villain they killed off too fast -- I had three or four more waiting in the wings. Eventually, collaboratively, we found the Real Enemies: Angela Forsythe and the London cliomancers and the Death-Goddess in the Hancock Building (who I decided was Forsythe's agent in America, to provide thematic unity), and through an amazing web of time-travel, sacred geometry, and shamanism, the PCs defeated them.

Chicago Ascended on schedule, January 1, 2000. Maybe you noticed.

Do Or Do Not: Um, I've Only Plotted For 'Do'

My favorite musing with *Star Wars: Episode I* (outside of the one about "experience the *Phantom Menace* at Taco Bell") is that the entire movie -- indeed, the entire movie *series* -- is dependent on the heroes being . . . well, dumb and lazy.

(Yeah, there are spoilers about *Episode I*. The movie's old news now. *Episode II: Beyond Thunderclone* will be here before we know it.)

In particular, at one point Obi-Wan and Qui-Gon need to buy an engine part. Now, Qui-Gon specifically tries to use his Jedi Mind Trick™ to get flying merchant Watto to accept Republic credits. But Watto is a Toydarian, and thus immune to such mind games (possibly because of his midi-chlorian count <*bwah-hah-hah!*>).

Now, in the movie, the "only" way for the Jedi Knights to get the part they need is to endure a long, preordained chario--er, *pod* race. And, in so doing, they get the part they need . . . and a boy who is prophesied to restore balance to the Force (probably by, y'know, killing all the Jedi; I hear Governor Tarkin has a plan for restoring balance to Alderaan, too . . .).

That was one of the points where the movie made me go, "Huh?"

I admit that I'm biased (*see also: obsessed*), but I tend to view many things in terms of how well they would work in a roleplaying situation. And, with just about every roleplaying group I've ever been with, those scenes would have played out as follows:

GM: "Watto has the part you need, but he won't accept Republic credits. Looks like you'll need to pod race to get the money."

PLAYER: "I use my powers to make him accept them!"

GM: "Uhhh . . . he's immune. Looks like it's time to pod race."

PLAYER: "I ask him to tell me the name of the richest person he knows who *isn't* a Toydarian."

GM: "Uhhh . . . he knows Jabba the Hutt. And, um, that's all. The pod race will be starting soon . . ."

PLAYER: "I ask Anakin who else has money."

GM: "Er, Anakin doesn't know anyone. Podracepodracepodrace . . ."

PLAYER: "Hey, wait! There's a pod race starting, right?"

GM: "YES!"

PLAYER: "Great! I systematically use my Jedi Mind Trick on *everyone* in the stadium, trying to swindle enough money to buy that part. I'm more than willing to reimburse them with double that amount in Republic credits, and I'll even throw in a slightly used Gungan. I'll start with the gamblers; by definition they *have* to have money, right?"

GM: [*long pause*] "I hate you."

In short, the more railroaded the players feel, the more they might resent it, and the more they may fight tooth and nail to avoid it. Likewise, the more crucial an entire story is on one plot point or development, the more likely the players are -- by design or accident -- to miss or short circuit that point entirely.

As an example, one time Kathryn had taken the reins as GM of our *Fading Suns* campaign for a one-shot adventure.

And the beginning of the adventure basically went like this:

GM: "Your ship's computers detect an interesting anomaly in space."

PLAYER: "We report it to the Emperor."

GM: "The Emperor tells you that he is investigating the matter, and you are not to proceed further."

PLAYER: "Okay; is there anything else going on around the palace?"

GM: "Um . . . nope. The Emperor seemed curiously adamant about not investigating that space disturbance."

PLAYER: "That's fine; we've taken an oath to him, so we won't investigate."

GM: "It's probably *really interesting* . . ."

PLAYER: "So there's nothing going on at the palace then?"

GM: "Nope. Nothing. There *is* that space anomaly, however . . ."

PLAYER: "Huh. I guess we'll go watch the pod races, then."

GM: *[long pause]* "I hate you."

(No, we weren't being malicious; we were being clueless.)

Eventually Kathryn manages to guide us back on-track, and we end up investigating the anomaly. (It turns out it was important to the plot . . . who knew?) After the adventure, our exasperated GM says, "I think that's the absolute *first* time that you all have ever *NOT* investigated something that someone *specifically* told you not to!"

"Well," I said, "that was the first time that 'someone' was the Emperor; we've taken an oath to obey him. All those other random schmoes who've told us not to investigate, we *had* to investigate . . . to return intelligence back to the Emperor."

And Kathryn kicked herself, having not considered that.

I receive many adventures for consideration at *Pyramid*, and a lot of them have a universal problem: No contingency plan. Otherwise brilliant and worthwhile adventures, with interesting and excellent scenes, have no plans for what happens if the heroes don't end up in those scenes. There will be an NPC the adventurers need to talk to, or a location they need to visit, or a clue they need to figure out; otherwise the adventure screeches to a halt. If such a keystone exists, then the odds are not insignificant that the party will crash the entire adventure.

Even worse, sometimes these adventures rely on something completely improbable. Like the *Episode I* pod race setup, they demand that the party do something in an unintelligent, uncharacteristic, or foolhardy manner. "When the heroes falsely accuse Old Man Peters, they will get the clue to *real* killer . . ." they might say. Or "When the adventurers surrender to the slavers, they will be escorted inside the hidden city . . ." (Most players would rather die than surrender, I've found.)

Tip to would-be writers: Almost universally, I will reject an adventure with this problem.

Here, then, are tips that should make writing your adventures a bit smoother, whether or not you intend to submit them for publication:

Always ask yourself, "What if they don't?" What if they don't talk to that person, go to that place, or defeat that enemy? At the extreme, what will happen if they don't partake of the adventure at all?

Consider having a timetable, or consider having a timeless adventure. A timetable is invaluable for many adventures; knowing what and when the Bad Guys hope to accomplish (in ideal circumstances) will enable you to answer the "What if they don't?" question very easily. Of course, you'll also need to have contingency plans for the bad guys, so they can have other options if the heroes meddle.

Barring a timetable, the "timeless" adventure is a perennial favorite. Epitomized by the dungeon crawl, these adventures are those where nothing would happen if the heroes just packed up and went home. The goblins would stay in their subterranean lair, waiting for adventurers; the derelict space station will remain unexplored; the lost city of Atlantis will remain lost. Of course, these type of adventures have their own problems, but at least they won't completely derail if the party fails to do one thing.

Consider what the heroes might try. Although it's impossible to plan for *every* action, it's usually possible to prepare for general paths of action. If the heroes choose an investigative route, you may have a list of clues they could gain. If they choose the forceful approach, you may list the opposition they face (and whether or how the heroes can win or escape). If you present enough options, a GM should be able to extrapolate. ("Okay; they're trying to bluff their way in. Well, that's similar to fighting their way in, and they'll face the same opponents . . . hmm.")

Don't rely on lynchpins. If you have a cool scene you want to subject the adventurers to, make *sure* it's foolproof that they arrive there. But, to be honest, you may want to consider the wisdom of having such a central scene in the first place.

Hopefully this advice will help both would-be adventure writers for *Pyramid* and those GMs who want to make scenarios for the comfort of their own home. And, maybe if you're lucky, eat right and get exercise, you'll avoid the Phantom Menace.

* * *

I'd mentioned it on the message boards, but I *am* still working on my *Exalted* review. Seeing as how it's 400+ pages in an itty-bitty font, it's taking a mite longer than I thought. Hopefully by next week.

* * *

Speaking of next week, I'll be (fates willing) at [Dragon*Con](#) next week. So I'll be out for a few days, having fun. And if you happen to have a couple of unused passes to get a poor editor in free, send 'em my way! <*grin*>

* * *

*Last week's answer: **Illuminati Y2K**, State Lotteries card.*

(Three stars)

"Cowabunga Conga

Chickabunga Conga

Cheeabunga Conga

Feast of the Innocents

The Meat Munch

The Patriarch"

Weather In Gaming

by James Jones

I. Introduction

*"Under the greenwood tree
Who loves to lie with me
And turn his merry note
Unto the sweet bird's throat
Come hither, come hither, come hither:
Here shall he see
No enemy
But winter and rough weather."
-- As You Like It, William Shakespeare*

As anyone who spends much time outside knows, the weather can make or break outdoor activities. This article is all about using weather successfully -- and realistically -- in your game. Weather doesn't have to follow realistic patterns, of course, and many times a GM needs a particular kind of weather. But when you want to have some random weather, it's good to know what makes sense for a given climate and season, and that is the focus of this article.

This article also focusing on Earth climates and weather, simply because those are the only ones we know about -- so far -- that apply to habitable places. Most fictional worlds conform closely enough to Earthly climates that the descriptions here should apply to them as well. For example, if you want your Elf Kingdom to be set in a sequoia forest, you might check the climate map of Earth, below, see that northern California is along the border of the B1 and C1 climate types, and use weather appropriate to those types. Putting the forest on the western margin of a continent (or eastern side if your fictional world spins the opposite direction) would just add that much more realism to the game world.

II. Climate and Worldbuilding

*"Everybody talks about the weather, but nobody does anything about it."
-- Charles Dudley Warner*

To understand weather, it's important first to understand climate: the average pattern of temperature and precipitation in a region. These patterns are fairly consistent from year to year, although there are notable and memorable exceptions. Examples include the Dust Bowl, caused by low precipitation levels across much of the U.S. Midwest for an entire decade; or the Maunder Minimum, a period of reduced solar output that took place from 1645-1715, which reduced temperatures worldwide.

The causes of climate are complex enough that even climatologists don't entirely understand them, but the basics are easy enough to comprehend. Much of the science follows logically from a few basic facts. First, air becomes less dense as it heats up, so cool air tends to fall relative to warm air. Second, the water-carrying capacity of air increases with temperature. Third, the rotation of the Earth causes winds to be deflected due to the Coriolis effect. Finally, for complex reasons, there is a so-called sub-tropical high at around 30 degrees of latitude, and a temperate low at around 60 degrees, in both hemispheres.

The result of all of this is that in general, there are three climate regimes in each hemisphere: the tropical zone, which extends from the equator to about 30 degrees latitude; the temperate zone, which extends from 30 degrees to 60 degrees; and the polar zone, which extends from 60 degrees to the poles. The prevailing winds in the tropical zone flow towards the equator, since the hot equator is a low-pressure region and is straddled by the sub-tropical highs. The

rotation of the Earth deflects these winds in an easterly direction, causing the trade winds. In the temperate zone, the winds flow from the subtropical high to the temperate low -- i.e., toward the poles -- and again the Earth's rotation deflects them, this time in a westerly direction. Finally, in the polar zone, the cold poles are high-pressure regions, and winds blow from there towards the temperate low. The rotational deflection is lessened with distance from the equator, so winds near the poles tend to be more along a north-south axis than those near the equator. The equatorial region itself is a zone of calm, without strong winds or violent weather, but the boundaries between the other major wind regimes -- especially around the subtropical low -- are birthing places for extreme weather such as hurricanes.

Complicating this picture are the effects of land and seasonal migration of the thermal equator. The thermal equator is determined approximately by where the sun is directly overhead, and since the earth is tilted on its axis, this region moves with the seasons. It only coincides with the equator during the equinoxes, migrating north to the Tropic of Cancer in June and south to the Tropic of Capricorn in December. As a result, the subtropical high and temperate low regions are also shifted, affecting the global circulation of air. The more axial tilt a world has, the more its thermal equator will migrate with the seasons.

Since water changes temperature far more slowly than land, winds tend to blow from the cooler (higher-pressure) sea towards the warmer (lower-pressure) land in hot times, with the reverse happening at cold times. On a small scale, this mechanism causes gentle sea and land breezes along coastlines, with the hot time occurring during the day and the cold time at night. On a large scale, the mechanism results in the annual pattern of wind and weather known as the monsoon. The most significant monsoon occurs along the Asian coastline, stretching from the Kamchatka peninsula in Russia south through China, the Koreas and Japan, through Southeast Asia and northern Australia, and then west into India and even Africa. In a world of your own creation, it should require a very large landmass on the scale of Asia to create a monsoon that has a large enough effect to dominate climate over a large area.

When building a world for a game, specifying the local climate for various points of interest can help in a variety of ways: first, it adds a realistic flavor to the game; second, it can help determine the agriculture and general way of life of the natives of the region; and finally, if you use the method detailed in this article, you will need to know the local climate in order to generate random daily weather.

III. Weather in the Game

"One of the brightest gems in the New England weather is the dazzling uncertainty of it."

-- Mark Twain

If you're building a world from scratch, the guidelines from the previous section should help you to develop a climate map similar to the Earth map below. The next step is to develop the details for particular regions of interest. The details consist of an annual weather pattern. The pattern should reflect seasonal variation, but how much detail to include with this is up to the GM: at the least, most places will have four distinct seasons and should have a different weather pattern for each. Very detail-oriented GMs might use monthly weather patterns or might use a system that smoothly varies the weather pattern from one point in time to the next. However you choose to do it, though, the result should be that on any given day, you know the weather pattern for the region of interest.

A weather pattern should consist of:

1. **Precipitation Rate:** A number which you must roll at or below on 3d in order for it to rain or snow. The higher the number, the greater the likelihood of rain.
2. **Precipitation Strength:** The average amount of rain that falls on a rainy day, in inches. It will be used only on rainy days, and will be modified by another roll on 3d.
3. **Mean Temperature:** The average daily temperature. Mean temperature is defined to be the average of the high and low temperatures for the day.
4. **Storm Modifier:** This value describes the limits of storm strength, and usually is between -2 and +2.

Other things to know about the region of interest include:

1. **Elevation:** Higher elevations tend to reduce temperatures and increase the daily temperature variation.
2. **Season:** For the purposes of this article, summer includes July, August, and September; fall includes October, November, and December; winter includes January, February, and March; and spring includes April, May, and June.

Generating the weather for a given day results from answering a series of questions:

Does it rain or not?

Roll 3d. On an 11 or less, check for rain normally by rolling 3d and comparing to the precipitation rate. On a 12 or above, today's result is the same as yesterday's: if there was rain yesterday, there is rain today as well, and vice versa. (If you did not determine the weather for the previous day, check for precipitation normally.)

How much does it rain?

Roll 1d to determine the multiplier for precipitation strength according to the rain volume table. Then roll 1d and consult the rain distribution table to determine how long the rain lasts.

Rain Volume Table

Roll Result

- 1-3 Light Rain (half average volume)
- 4-5 Moderate Rain (average volume)
- 6 Heavy Rain/Storm (roll 3d on Storm Table, below, using the storm modifier)

Storm Table

Roll Result

- 5 or less 5 x Rain and Minor Storm
- 6-13 2 x Rain and Minor Storm
- 14 2 x Rain and Major Storm
- 15 5 x Rain and Minor Storm
- 16 5 x Rain and Major Storm
- 17 10 x Rain and Minor Storm
- 18 or more 10 x Rain and Major Storm

Minor Storm: Winds are gusty but not dangerously strong: hurricanes, for example, are impossible, and no tornadoes are formed. Light hail will fall on a roll of 6 or less on 3d if the temperature is above freezing. Make a lightning roll (see Weather Effects, below) only once during the entire storm.

Major Storm: Winds may be dangerous; add +5 to the Wind Roll, below. Light hail will fall on a roll of 10 or less on 3d; if the roll is 6 or less, hail is Damaging instead (see Hail, below). Make a lightning roll (see Weather Effects, below) once per hour during the storm.

Rain Distribution Table

Roll Result

- 1-3 Less than 4 hours.
- 4-5 Between 4 and 12 hours.

6 Between 12 and 24 hours.

If the precipitation for the day is concentrated in a short period of time, it will be a more intense rain. Example: Precipitation Strength is 0.2, and a 4 is rolled indicating a rain of normal strength (0.2 inches). If this is spread over an entire day, it results in only drizzle; if it all occurs in only 3 hours, the result is a light rain. Long duration rains are often scattered showers rather than a constant, very light drizzle.

Rain is really snow if the temperature is below 32°F. Fresh snowfall is about 1/3 as dense as rain, so each inch of precipitation that falls as snow produces 3 inches of snow. Keep this in mind when temperature is determined.

How cloudy is it?

The amount of cloud cover can vary greatly over a period of a day, and such variations are beyond the level of detail of this model. But some sort of average cloud cover can be useful to know and also determines how greatly the temperature varies over the day. If precipitation has occurred, the cloudiness roll is modified by the rain distribution: less than 4 hours, no modifier; between 4 and 12 hours, +2 to the roll; between 12 and 24 hours, automatically Overcast (don't bother to roll).

Cloud Cover

Roll Cloud Cover

3-6 Clear

7-8 Scattered

9-10 Partly Cloudy (Scattered for Types B1 and F)

11-13 Cloudy (Partly Cloudy for Types B1 and F)

14-16 Overcast (Cloudy for Types B1 and F)

17-18 Overcast

Cloud Cover	Description	Temp Variation	Humidity
Clear	No clouds, or very thin cloud cover	30°F	-1 level
Scattered	Light fluffy clouds cover about 1/4 of the sky	25°F	normal
Partly Cloudy	Clouds cover about half the sky	20°F	normal
Cloudy	Clouds cover about 3/4 of the sky	15°F	normal
Overcast	Sky visible through scattered breaks, if at all	10°F	+1 level

What is the day's average temperature?

Roll 3d and consult the following table:

Roll	Continental Marine Modifier		
-3 or less	-25°F	-15°F	-8 on next roll.
-2 to 0	-20°F	-10°F	-8 on next roll.
1-2	-15°F	-10°F	-8 on next roll.
3-4	-10°F	-5°F	-8 on next roll.
5-6	-5°F	-5°F	-4 on next roll.
7-8	-5°F	+0°F	-4 on next roll.
9-12	+0°F	+0°F	None
13-14	+5°F	+0°F	+4 on next roll.
15-16	+5°F	+5°F	+4 on next roll.

17-18	+10°F	+5°F	+8 on next roll.
19-20	+15°F	+10°F	+8 on next roll.
21-23	+20°F	+10°F	+8 on next roll.
24 or more	+25°F	+15°F	+8 on next roll.

Continental: Includes types A3, B2, C2, D2, E and F2.

Marine: Includes types A1, A2, B1, C1, D1 and F1.

Note that a particular small region may be considered Marine even if it is technically in a different climate type, if it borders a large body of water. An ocean or very large lake (on the order of a Great Lake) is required to cause this effect.

How humid is it?

The humidity is determined by the Precipitation Rate. If the Rate is 5 or less, humidity is Dry; if 6 or 7, Moderate; if 8 to 10, Humid; and if above 10, Very Humid. If the average temperature for the day exceeds 100°F, reduce humidity by one level for that day only.

What are the high and low temperatures?

The temperature variation for a day is based on several factors: elevation, humidity, cloud cover, and the direction of the sun's rays. Base variation is determined by cloud cover, using the table above. Adjust this figure as follows:

- For elevations above 10,000 feet, add 10°F.
- In the summer, add 5°F; in the winter, subtract 5°F. No adjustment necessary in spring and fall.
- Adjust for humidity: Dry, add 5°F; Moderate, no adjustment; Humid, subtract 5°F; and Very Humid, subtract 10°F.
- If variation is below 5°F, increase it to 5°F.

The variation gives the difference between the high and low for the day, with the average mid-way between them. So the high temperature is the average temperature plus half the variation; the low is the average temperature minus half the variation. If it is important to know the temperature at arbitrary times during the day, assume that the low occurs just before sunrise, the average occurs around noon, and the high occurs in late afternoon. If overnight temperatures are needed, roll for the next day's temperatures and assume that the temperature changes steadily from the current day's high to the next day's low.

How windy is it?

Roll 3d, add the Storm Modifiers and a +5 if there is a Major Storm, and consult the table:

Roll Result

- 7- Calm (3 mph or less)
- 8-12 Breeze (4 to 12 mph)
- 13-14 Strong breeze (13 to 30 mph)
- 15-17 Gale (31 to 55 mph)
- 18-20 Storm (56 to 75 mph)
- 21+ Hurricane (over 75 mph)

Is there any extreme weather?

Extreme weather is caused by high winds or heavy precipitation, and often both together. The rolls already made are sufficient to determine whether a storm has occurred.

GM's prerogative

The GM should consider this model a guideline, not a straitjacket. The model described here is a good general system that produces realistic ranges of effects, but it cannot pretend to cover the entire range of weather possible anywhere. For example, a GM running a game in San Francisco should keep in mind that humid ocean air often becomes fog during the evening chill and rule accordingly, even though the model does not explicitly handle this condition.

Examples

Precip Check: 8

Precip Strength: 0.3 inches

Mean Temperature: 70°F

Climate Type: B2

Humidity: Moderate

Season: Summer

Storm Modifier: +2

Day 1: First, check for rain. This is the first day determining weather for this location, so we simply roll against the precipitation check and get an 8, indicating that there is rain today. The precipitation strength roll is a 5, which indicates normal rain volume of 0.3 inches. The precipitation distribution roll is a 4, so the rain falls over a period of 4 to 12 hours. Since it is raining, the cloud cover roll gets a +2 modifier. The roll itself is a 10, modified to 12, which results in Cloudy conditions, giving a base temperature variation of 15°F and no humidity modifier. The temperature roll comes up 13, which gives us +5°F in a continental climate for a daily average of 75°F and a +4 on the next day's roll. Humidity is moderate, and this is unchanged by temperature. The actual temperature variation is +5°F because of the summer, for a total of 20°F, so the high is 85°F and the low is 65°F. The wind roll is a 9, modified to 11 by the Storm Modifier, so the result is a Breeze.

Day 2: Rolling 3d, we get a 12, which means that the precipitation result for today is the same as it was yesterday. It rained yesterday, so it does again today. The precipitation strength roll is a 6, which indicates heavy rain or a storm, and the precipitation distribution roll is a 1, so the rain falls over a period of 4 hours or less. Since a storm was indicated, we need to roll on the Storm Table. The result is a 12, modified by the +2 Storm Modifier to give a 14. This results in double precipitation strength (total of 0.6 inches) and a Major Storm. The distribution roll is a 2, indicating a storm lasting under 4 hours. The Cloud Cover roll is an 8, which gives Scattered Clouds and a base temperature variation of 25°F. The temperature roll is a 12, but yesterday's roll gave a +4 modifier for today, so the result is a 16, which results in a +5°F and another +4 on the next day's roll. So average temperature is 75°F. Humidity remains moderate. The final temperature variation is +5°F because of the summer, for a total of 30°F, so the high is 90°F and the low is 60°F. The wind roll is 11, modified to 13 by the Storm Modifier and to 18 by the fact of a Major Storm, so the result is a Storm, with 56 to 75 mph winds.

IV. Climate Types

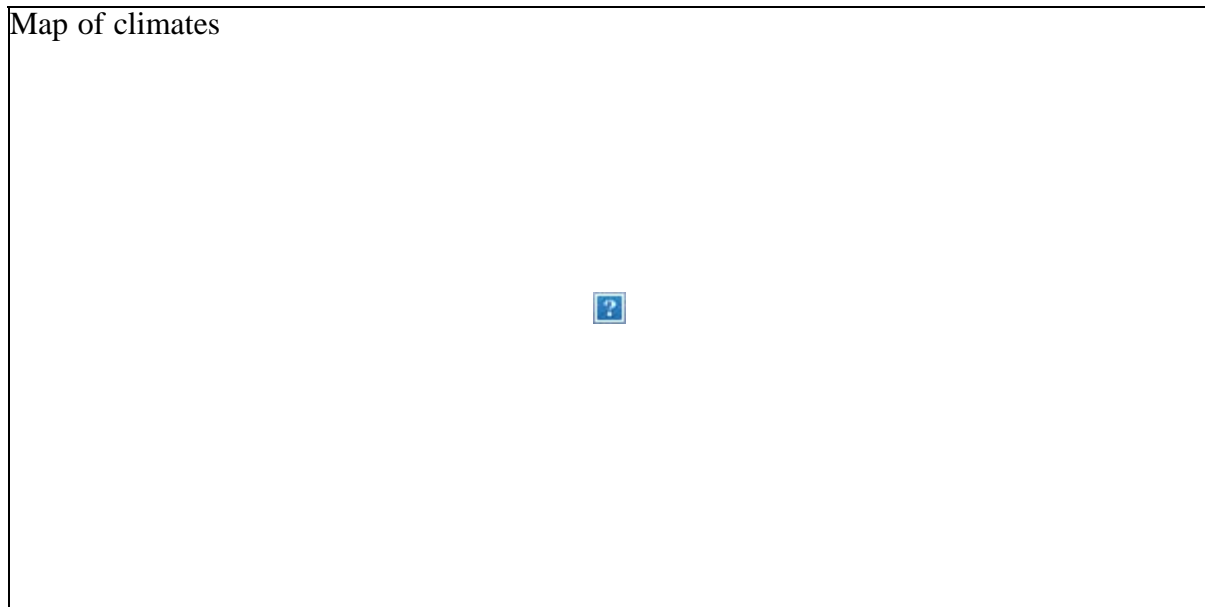
"Olympus, where they say there is an abode of the gods, ever unchanging: it is neither shaken by winds nor ever wet with rain, nor does snow come near it, but clear weather spreads cloudless about it, and a white radiance stretches above it."

-- *The Odyssey*, Homer

To simplify the job of determining the local climate, we use the Miller classification system, which breaks down any place on Earth into one of 12 categories. Each category is described below in some detail, including information on typical and extreme temperature and rainfall patterns, their usual geographic locations, and the stereotypical **GURPS**

terrain type for that climate. Reference the included climatic map of the Earth for a more detailed breakdown of where the climate types tend to appear. The Miller system classifies each place on Earth first and most broadly by its temperature and then on a finer level by its rainfall pattern. The breakpoint of 43°F appears several times in the definitions; that is the temperature below which plant growth is arrested, so growing seasons can only include periods of time when the temperature is above that point.

- A** Hot (annual mean temperature at least 70°F)
- B** Warm-temperate (no monthly mean temperature below 43°F)
- C** Cool-temperate (one to five months with mean temperature below 43°F)
- D** Cold (six or more months with mean temp. below 43°F)
- E** Arctic (no month with mean temp. above 50°F)
- F** Desert (less than 10" annual rainfall)
- G** Mountain (used as a modifier to primary climate type, and indicates that high terrain is an important factor in local climate)



Type A Climates

The hot A climate type is subclassed into three main rainfall patterns: A1, equatorial, in which there is a double rainfall maximum; A2, tropical marine, in which there is no pronounced dry season; and A3, tropical continental, in which there is a pronounced dry season. Each of the three has a monsoon subtype in which the primary climate is dominated by monsoonal effects at certain times of the year. Type A climates typically fall within 30° of the equator, with the A1 subtype occupying the most equatorial regions within 5° of the equator, and the A2 and A3 subtypes elsewhere. The A3 subtype is the most common of the A types on Earth.

The mean temperature of most type A climates is 75-85°F during the summer. Subtype A1 has almost no seasonal variation at all, whereas both A2 and A3 subtypes will often dip to the 60-80°F range in the winter. Extreme temperatures for all subtypes are usually from 50 to 90°F.

A1 (Equatorial)

Definition: Double rainfall maximum.

Precipitation: There are two wet seasons (around April and October), and two dry seasons (usually July and December). However, even the dry seasons are pretty wet in most cases. The wet seasons have a precipitation rate of 9

to 12, while the dry seasons are 6 to 10. On the extreme dry end (which is very rare), the rate might be as low as 4 or 5, while on the extreme wet end, the rate might be 16 or 17. Average precipitation strength can be from 0.2 to 1 inch, and remains fairly consistent throughout the year.

Terrain Types: Jungle.

Storm Modifiers: Usually -2.

A2 (Tropical Marine)

Definition: Winter gets at least 20% as much precipitation as summer.

Precipitation: The year is partitioned into a winter dry season and a summer wet season. The dry season should have a precipitation rate between 6 and 10, while the wet season should have a rate between 7 and 12. The driest areas are quite desert-like and may have a precipitation rate of 3 during the dry season and only 7 or 8 during the wet, while the wettest areas have substantial rain year round with a rate around 10 during the dry season and 14 and up during the wet. Precipitation strength can be from 0.2 to 1 inch and is highest during the wet season.

Terrain Types: Jungle.

Storm Modifiers: -2 or -1.

A3 (Tropical Continental)

Definition: Winter gets less than 20% as much precipitation as summer.

Precipitation: The winter is very dry, with a precipitation rate of 7 or lower; conversely, the summer is quite wet, with a rate between 9 and 12. The driest areas are quite desert-like and may have a precipitation rate of 3 during the winter and only 7 or 8 otherwise, while the wettest areas have a rate of 8 or 9 during the winter and 14 and up otherwise. Precipitation strength is strongly seasonal, often 0.1 to 0.2 inches during the winter dry season and 0.3 to 1 inch otherwise.

Terrain Types: Jungle, Plains.

Storm Modifiers: -2 to 0.

Type B Climates

The warm B climate type is subclassed into two main rainfall patterns: B1, Western continental margin, in which rain only falls in the winter; and B2, Eastern continental margin, in which rain falls at all seasons. Only the B2 type has a monsoon subtype. Type B climates typically fall between 30° and 40° latitude, but warm ocean currents can extend the type B climate to over 50°.

Most type B climates experience summer temperatures of 70-80°F with extremes of 55-90°F, and winter temperatures of 43-55°F with extremes of 35-60°F.

B1 (Western Continental)

Definition: Winter gets at least 50% more precipitation than summer.

Precipitation: The summer is the dry season in a B1 climate, with a precipitation rate of 7 or lower, and never above 9. The winter usually has a precipitation rate of 9 or 10, with extremes ranging from 6 to 12. Precipitation strength is 0.1 to 0.5 inches and is highest during the winter.

Terrain Types: Plains.

Storm Modifiers: -2 or -1.

B2 (Eastern Continental)

Definition: Winter gets less than 50% more precipitation than summer.

Precipitation: Rain is usually evenly distributed in a B2 climate, with a precipitation rate of 8 or 9 in every month. Precipitation strength is 0.1 to 0.5 inches and varies little throughout the year. However, the B2 subtype is sometimes found adjacent to A2 or A3 types, in which case there may be a winter dry season. In this case, use precipitation rates and strengths similar to those found in A2 and A3 climates.

Terrain Types: Woodlands.

Storm Modifiers: 0 to +2.

Type C and D Climates

The cool and cold (C and D) climate types are each subclassed into two main rainfall patterns: continental (C1 and D1), in which rain falls at all seasons; and marine (C2 and D2), in which there is a summer rain maximum. Both marine subtypes may experience monsoons. The latitude band stretching from 40° to 50° is made up mostly of type C temperatures, while type D climates may be found from 50° to 65°. Naturally, these latitude bands are only rough guidelines: type C climates may be found as near to the equator as 30° and as close to the poles as 60°, while type D climates can be found at 45° or 75°.

Temperatures in type C climates run from 60-80°F in the summer and 25-40°F in the winter. The summer extremes are from 50-90°F, and winter extremes are from 10-40°F. In type D climates, summers are usually from 50-65°F, with extremes ranging from 50-75°F. Winters, however, are quite dependent on the subtype: the marine subtype D1 experiences winters in the 5 to 25°F range, with extremes from -5 to 40°F. The continental subtype D2, however, has much more severe winters in the -25 to 5°F range, with extremes as low as -55°F and as high as 30°F.

C1 (Marine)

Definition: Winter gets more precipitation than summer.

Precipitation: Along the C1/2 boundary, rainfall is evenly distributed throughout the year, with a rate of 8 or 9. More coastal C1 regions have a stronger winter rainy season, in which the rate usually rises to 9 or 10, while the summer dry season has a rate of between 6 and 8. Precipitation strength remains between 0.2 and 0.4 inches year round.

Terrain Types: Woodlands.

Storm Modifiers: -2 or -1.

C2 (Continental)

Definition: Summer gets more precipitation than winter.

Precipitation: Along the C1/2 boundary, rainfall is evenly distributed throughout the year, with a rate of 8 or 9. More continental C2 regions have a stronger summer rainy season, in which the rate usually rises to 9 or 10, while the winter dry season has a rate of between 7 and 10. Precipitation strength is between 0.1 and 0.5 inches and is highest in the summer.

Terrain Types: Woodlands, Plains.

Storm Modifiers: -1 to +1.

D1 (Marine)

Definition: Winter gets at least 75% as much precipitation as summer.

Precipitation: There is usually a slight winter rainy season, in which the precipitation rate is between 10 and 12 (with extremes of 9 to 17), and a summer dry season in which the rate falls to 9 or 10 (with extremes of 8 to 11). Precipitation strength is 0.1 to 0.4 inches and remains constant throughout the year.

Terrain Types: Woodlands.

Storm Modifiers: -2 or -1.

D2 (Continental)

Definition: Winter gets less than 75% as much precipitation as summer.

Precipitation: Summer is a distinct rainy season, but the major difference between the rainy and dry seasons is precipitation strength, which is often under 0.1 inches in the winter but runs from 0.1 to 0.3 inches during the summer. The precipitation rate is usually a 9 or 10 all year, with more variation in the winter (extremes from 5 to 17) than the summer (extremes from 9 to 11).

Terrain Types: Woodlands, Arctic.

Storm Modifiers: -1 to +1.

Type E Climate

The arctic E climate type has no subclasses and no monsoon subtype. This type is typically found at latitudes from 70° to the poles, although it is possible to find type E as close to the equator as 50°.

Temperatures for type E climates are chilly even in the summer, peaking at 35-50°F (extremes 25-50°F), and bitterly cold in the winter, where the *typical* average is from -30 to 0°F, and the extremes run from -55 to 20°F.

Precipitation: Arctic regions are invariably dry, some even falling below the 10"/year breakpoint that defines a desert. The precipitation rate is usually an 8 or 9, but extremes can be as low as 6 or as high as 11. Precipitation strength is 0.05 to 0.2 inches. Coastal regions get the most precipitation. If there is a precipitation peak, it occurs during the fall.

Terrain Types: Arctic.

Storm Modifiers: -2 to 0.

Type F Climates

The desert F climate type is subclassed into two subtypes, distinguished by rainfall and latitude. The hot F1 subtype straddles the Tropics of Cancer and Capricorn in belts around the entire globe. In fact the primary cause of F1 deserts is latitude: the sub-tropical high in the 30° latitude band keeps water-laden winds out. The mid-latitude F2 subtype, however, is more often associated with the rain shadow of a mountain range or simply being distant from a source of water.

Temperatures for type F climates are determined almost entirely by latitude and elevation, with little humidity or nearby sources of water to complicate the situation. The hotter F1 deserts experience temperatures of 90-110°F in the

summer and 70-90°F in the winter, while F2 deserts may experience temperatures similar to F1 or may be much colder: from -50°F in the winter to 50°F in the summer.

Precipitation: The precipitation rate for both F1 and F2 subtypes is between 4 and 7 all year, although isolated regions may have short rainy seasons in which the rate rises as high as 11. Precipitation strength is 0.05 to 0.2 inches.

Terrain Types: Desert.

Storm Modifiers: -1 to +1.

Type G Climates

The mountainous type G climate is not properly its own type, but rather a modifier on other types (thus Cali, Colombia, on a mountaintop in the Amazonian basin, would be classified as an A1[G]). The effects of high altitude include both decreased temperature and a change in total rainfall. The pattern of rainfall, however, is usual similar in mountains as in the lower surrounding areas. The effect of altitude on temperature is more consistent. A good rule of thumb is that every 300 feet of elevation causes a 1°F decrease in average temperature. As a result, a very high mountain can have a climate similar to that found at the poles.

Terrain Types: Mountains.

V. Weather Effects

"Not snow, no, nor rain, nor heat, nor night keeps them from accomplishing their appointed courses with all speed."
-- Herodotus

Cold

Use the rules from p. CII133 and p. B130 for the effects of cold.

Heat

Our bodies cool off by perspiring; the perspiration carries heat away by evaporating. In very humid conditions, however, evaporation is not as efficient and, as a result, our bodies cannot cool off as easily. This increases the effective temperature on hot, humid days. Whenever the temperature is at least 70°F, use the table below to determine effective temperature before applying the rules on p. B130. Note that for PCs that do not use the evaporation of water to keep cool, humidity has no effect.

Humidity Level

Temp	Dry	Moderate	Humid	Very Humid
70	69	75	76	76
75	71	76	78	80
80	75	79	83	90
85	79	82	88	106
90	83	87	94	117
95	88	91	101	126
100	92	97	107	135
105	97	102	114	144
110	102	107	120	152

115	106	112	126	159
120	111	118	132	166
125	115	122	138	173
130	119	127	144	179
135	122	131	149	185

Rain

Even gentle rain generally reduces visibility to a mile or less. Also see the sidebars on p. B187-188 and p. VE151 for more rules on how rain affects travel.

Flooding and mudslides are natural hazards that may occur after heavy rains. Whether they actually occur is dependent on the local conditions: areas with many waterways and low elevations are most at risk from flooding, while steep hillsides with little vegetation are most at risk from mudslides. Deep mud is a travel hazard and should be treated as Very Bad Terrain using the rules on p. B188 or those on p. VE153 for vehicular movement.

Snow/Ice

Use the rules for arctic hazards on p. CII133-135 for the effects of snow and ice; also see the sidebar on p. B188 for the strength of various thicknesses of ice.

Wind

The effects of wind on sailing ships are given on p. VE158-159. But wind can have other game effects as well. Up to a Strong Breeze, these effects are mostly a nuisance (papers may be blown away, parachutists will be blown off course, etc.). Stronger winds, though, can make it difficult to move or act at all. Reduce Speed and all physical skills by 1 for each full 20 mph over 30 mph of wind speed.

Lightning

Lightning can start fires and can also damage characters directly. Check once during a minor storm, or once per hour during a major storm, to see whether any character has been struck by lightning. The roll should be against 15 in a flat area with no shelter, 16 in most places, and 17 if there is excellent shelter available. During a lightning storm, characters should be allowed to roll once vs. Survival to take shelter in the safest available location; improve the effective shelter by one level on a success (so no improvement is possible if excellent shelter is already available). If the roll is missed, a random character is struck by lightning.

A lightning strike should be treated as a lethal electric shock using the rules on p. CII139. Lightning does 1d to 3d of damage, but GMs should realize that a 3d lightning bolt would almost certainly stop the heart of a normal human. A lightning strike typically contains between 1,000 and 10,000 MW-s of energy, far too much for most Draw Power or Conduct Power spells to handle.

Thunder

Lightning causes a thunderclap as the ionized air dissipates violently. Nearby thunder sounds like sharp cracks and can be deafening; faraway thunder has a rumbling sound and is not generally loud enough to mask other noises. Thunder can give a general bonus of up to +3 to Stealth rolls depending on its frequency and volume, or it may be used to mask individual sounds such as gunshots. Any character may make an IQ roll to predict when a thunderclap will arrive after a flash of lightning (the rule of thumb is that the distance to the lightning flash in miles is equal to the delay between flash and thunder in seconds, times five). The thunderclap gives up to a -5 penalty to Hearing rolls (depending on intensity) if it is correctly timed.

Hail

Hail is created when freezing rain is blown repeatedly back up into the cloud layer by strong updrafts. The frozen droplets continue to add layers of ice until they are too heavy to continue the process, at which point they fall to earth. Hail is unusual, and is most often associated with strong winds, thunderstorms, and temperatures *above* freezing. Small hailstones are only a nuisance (make a Will roll each turn to concentrate while being pelted by hail, as per p. M37), but larger ones can damage characters and their possessions; each turn in a damaging hailstorm, roll 3d. On a 6 or less, the character is hit and takes 1d damage to the head.

VI. References

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The Long Arm of the Law

Police Weapons in *GURPS*

by Hans-Christian Vortisch

The player characters will come into contact with enforcers of the law in many adventures set in the 20th-century. Any action-thriller or detective story requires them.

It may also be that the characters are in fact members of the law enforcement community themselves. [FBI](#) agents instantly come to mind, prominent in the public eye through such shows as *Twin Peaks* or *The X-Files*. The *Call of Cthulhu* supplement *Delta Green* has shown that there is a wealth of agencies, both American and foreign, to be used as parent agencies for PCs and NPCs.

Officers of the law are usually armed. It will be interesting to know which weapons are in service, regardless if these are for issue to the PCs or used against them by NPC coppers.

The FBI's Inventory

"Brand new issue. More accurate and efficient. Smith & Wesson 10mm Model 1076, all stainless steel. It's a beautiful weapon Coop, and it's all yours."

-- FBI Deputy Director Gordon Cole, 1990 (from *Twin Peaks*, Episode 25: "On the Wings of Love")

To illustrate the changes that advancing technology and differing environments had on law enforcement armaments in the USA, the issue weapons of the [FBI](#) are examined here in some detail. Similar developments occurred with other federal agencies, local police forces and, to a lesser extent, law enforcement agencies abroad.

When the [Bureau of Investigation](#) was founded in 1908, its agents were unarmed. They were not allowed to make armed arrests, but could carry privately owned weapons "for self-defense". During the gangster era in the late 1920s, early 1930s, these did include handguns, sawn-off shotguns and Auto-Ordnance Model 1921 Tommy guns.

After the Kansas City Massacre in 1934, the year before the agency was renamed the [Federal Bureau of Investigation](#), it was decided to arm its agents. The original issue weapon was the .32 LC Colt Police Positive revolver (use Colt Official Police in .32-20 WCF), a small, easily concealed weapon with mediocre performance. In 1937, it was superseded by the .38 Special Colt Official Police, which remained standard issue until 1984. In the same year, the .357 Magnum S&W Magnum revolver (p. HT110) was adopted for agents working violent crime. The .38 Special S&W Model 13 Military & Police revolver (p. HT110) was adopted in 1982 and used until the widespread adoption of semi-automatic pistols in the early 1990s. The first self-loading pistol was the .38 Super Colt Super Auto (a variant of the Colt Government, p. HT108, with Shots 9+1), originally obtained in small numbers in 1938 to counter the "bullet-proof" vests of contemporary gangsters. It remained in service until 1958.

In 1981, the SWAT units received the 9x19mm FN-Browning HP-35 pistol (p. HT108), and this was also the sidearm of the Hostage Rescue Team when founded in 1983. After the Miami Massacre of 1987, which had shown the limits of .38 Special revolvers, the first larger batches of 9x19mm semi-automatic pistols were purchased in 1988: the 9x19mm SIG-Sauer P226 and 9x19mm S&W Model 5946. Most went to the HRT and the regional SWAT agents. In 1989, the new 10x25mm S&W Model 1076 pistol was adopted, designed to the FBI's specifications and intended to replace all other handguns then in service. It turned out to be a total failure, the entire order of some 12,000 guns was returned in the early 1990s. The FBI first purchased more SIG-Sauer P226 pistols and then, in 1992, adopted its slightly more compact cousin, the 9x19mm SIG-Sauer P228. Female agents with small hands could choose the slim-line 9x19mm SIG-Sauer P225 with single-stack magazine (use P228 with Shots 8+1).

Undercover agents had a choice of small revolvers (all adopted during the 1970s), among them the .38 Special S&W Model 10 Military & Police with 2" barrel (p. HT110), .38 Special S&W Model 38 Bodyguard Airweight (p. SO100) and .38 Special S&W Model 60 Chief's Special Stainless. From January 1998, the FBI started to issue the .40 S&W Glock 22 pistol (p. HT109), with the slightly smaller .40 S&W Glock 23 (use Glock 22 with Shots 13+1) for those who preferred it. The ultra-compact .40 S&W [Glock 27](#) was authorized as concealed backup. Since early 2000, selected other .40 S&W pistols have been authorized for carry, such as the H&K USP Compact (a smaller variant of the USP, p. HT109, with Shots 12+1) and SIG-Sauer P229 (p. HT109). The HRT had adopted the .45 ACP Les Baer SRP Bureau pistol in 1995, a heavily customized Colt Government-copy (p. HT108 with Acc 3, Wt 3.0, Shots 14+1). Members of the regional SWAT teams received the .45 ACP Springfield Bureau Model since 1998, another Colt Government-copy (p. HT108 with Acc 3, Shots 8+1).

Heavier Weapons

"The firing of a machine gun is a sobering experience."

-- Dale Cooper, at the FBI Academy in Quantico, 1977 (from *The Autobiography of FBI Special Agent Dale Cooper*)

Long arms of the early days included the .45 ACP Auto-Ordnance Model 1921 Thompson submachine gun (pp. HT115-116), the .30 Remington Model 81A semi-automatic rifle, various models of the .30-06 Colt BAR and 12-gauge pump-action shotguns (use Winchester Model 1897, p. HT124). Many of these weapons continued to stay in service until the 1980s. In 1989, the 9x19mm H&K MP5SFA2 and MP5SFA3 semi-automatic carbines (otherwise as MP5A2 and MP5A3, pp. HT116, SO105-106) were adopted for standard issue to field agents. In addition, the 12-gauge SGT Tactical Response Model 90102 FBI shotgun was introduced.

When the regional SWAT teams were formed beginning in 1973, the 5.56x45mm Colt M16A1 assault rifle (p. HT115) was introduced. In the 1980s, the main weapons of the HRT and SWAT agents were various models of the 9x19mm H&K MP5 submachine gun, including the MP5A3 and the sound-suppressed MP5SD3. In the 1990s, they used the 10x25mm H&K MP5/10A3 submachine gun, full-auto variants of both the 5.56x45mm Colt M16A2 assault rifle and [Colt M4](#) assault carbine (p. SO101), plus 7.62x51mm H&K G3A3 assault rifles (p. HT115). Sniper rifles included variations on the 7.62x51mm Remington Model 700 (p. SO101) and the .50 BMG Barrett Model 82A1 (p. HT115).

Selected Police Inventories in the 20th-century

A number of agencies from all over the world with their inventories at specific times. Two popular eras were selected: the 1920s and the 1990s, the latter being mostly valid for today as well.

Police Officer, Metropolitan Police, London, England, 1920s

Although the bobbies of the Metropolitan Police (Scotland Yard) were unarmed except for a truncheon, the detectives, Royal body guards, and mounted police officers received a .32 ACP Webley & Scott Police Model pocket pistol. In emergencies, 14-gauge Greener-Martini Police Gun Mk III single-shot shotguns could be issued (use Martini-Henry rifle, p. HT124, with Dam 4d-2, Acc 5, 1/2D 25, Max 150).

Police Officer, *Preussische Schutzpolizei*, Berlin, Germany, 1920s

All officers of the Prussian police were issued the SG98/05 (use shortsword), a small sword which could be fixed as a bayonet on the issue rifle. In addition, a telescoping steel baton (use ASP) and a rubber nightstick (use small club) were available. Mounted police had a cavalry saber. The standard handgun was the 9x19mm DWM-Luger P08 pistol (p. HT108), but *Kriminalpolizei* detectives usually carried a smaller weapon such as the .32 ACP Sauer M13 (use Walther PP with Shots 7+1). Heavy weapons included the 9x19mm Bergmann MP18/I submachine gun (issued to one in twenty officers, p. HT115), 7.92x57mm Mauser Kar98a bolt-action rifle (use Gew98, p. HT114, sometimes with 4x scope) and 7.92x57mm DWM-Maxim MG08 water-cooled machine gun (two issued as part of armored car armament, pp. HT117-118). The rural police (*Landjäger*) was similar armed, except for the automatic weapons. Similar arms

were used in all German states.

Police Officer, Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Canada, 1920s

The Mounties used the .455 S&W Colt New Service revolver between 1905-1954 (use Webley No 1 Mk VI, p. HT124), and after WWI replaced the unreliable .303 S&W Ross Mk I bolt-action rifle with the .303 S&W Lee-Enfield Mk I bolt-action rifle (see SMLE No 1 Mk III, p. HT114). Some .45 ACP Auto-Ordnance Model 1921 submachine guns (pp. HT115-116) were also in service.

Texas Ranger, Texas State Police, Texas, 1920s

Each Ranger was issued a .45 ACP Colt Government pistol (p. HT108) and a .30-30 Winchester Model 1894 lever-action carbine (p. HT114). Other popular weapons, often purchased privately, were the 7.65x21mm DWM-Luger American Eagle pistol (commercial Parabellum, p. HT108), .38 Super Auto Colt Government pistol (p. HT108 with Shots 9+1), .45 Long Colt M1873 S&W revolver (p. HT110), .45 ACP Auto-Ordnance Model 1921 Thompson submachine gun (pp. HT115-116), .35 Remington Model 8A semi-automatic carbine, .30-06 Colt BAR automatic rifle and 12-gauge Winchester Model 1897 pump-action shotgun (pp. HT111-112).

Special Agent, U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency, USA, 1990s

Between 1992-1998, the issue sidearm was the 9x19mm SIG-Sauer P228 pistol. In late 1998, the .40 S&W Glock 22 pistol (p. HT109) was adopted as new standard handgun. However, since 2000, agents could replace the Glock with one of a number of .40 S&W caliber guns, including the H&K USP Compact (use USP, p. HT109, with Shots 12+1), SIG-Sauer P226, or SIG-Sauer P229 (p. HT109), if they wanted. Other guns available included the 9x19mm Colt CAR-15 Model 635 submachine gun (replaced by the .40 S&W [H&K UMP](#) from 2001), 5.56x45mm [H&K HK53A5N](#) assault carbine and 12-gauge Remington Model 870P pump-action shotgun (p. HT112).

The DEA agents of the drug war in South America fielded 5.56x45mm [Colt CAR-15A2 Model 723](#) assault carbines, 7.62x51mm Saco M60 machine guns (p. HT119) and 40x46mmSR Colt M79 grenade launchers (p. HT121).

Police Officer, Grenzschutzgruppe 9, Bundesgrenzschutz, Germany, 1990s

The standard sidearm of the GSG9 anti-terror unit of the German border guards was the 9x19mm H&K P7 pistol (p. HT109) from 1980-1993, then replaced by the 9x19mm Glock P9 (German designation for the Glock 17, p. HT109). Long arms included the 9x19mm H&K MP5A3, MP5SD3 and [MP5K](#) submachine guns (pp. HT116, SO105-106), 5.56x45mm SIG G37 assault carbine (German designation for the [SIG SG551 SWAT](#)), 7.62x51mm [H&K G8](#) automatic rifle, 7.62x51mm H&K PSG1 sniper rifle (p. HT115), 7.62x51mm Mauser 66SP sniper rifle, 12-gauge H&K HK502 shotgun (use Benelli M1 Super 90) and 40x46mmSR H&K MZP1 grenade launcher (use "Granatpistole", p. HT121). The Mauser rifle was replaced from 1997 by the .300 Winchester Magnum ERMA SR-100 (use [Accuracy International AWM](#)). For emergencies the 67mm MBB Armbrust light antitank weapon was in the inventory (use M72 LAW, p. HT122).

Military Police Officer, Gruppo Interventio Speciale, Carabinieri, Italy, 1990s

GIS was a SpecOps unit with a law enforcement mission, including hostage rescue and operations against the Mafia. Firearms included the 9x19mm Beretta M-92SB pistol (pp. HT108-109), .357 Magnum S&W Model 28 Highway Patrolman revolver (p. HT110), 9x19mm Beretta M-93R machine pistol (pp. HT108-109), 9x19mm [Beretta PM-12S](#) submachine gun, 9x19mm H&K MP5A5 submachine gun and MP5SD3 suppressed submachine gun (pp. HT116, SO105-106), 5.56x45mm Beretta SC-70/90 assault rifle (use Colt M16A1, p. HT115), 7.62x51mm H&K PSG1 sniper rifle (p. HT115), 7.62x51mm Mauser 86SR sniper rifle (use Mauser 66SP with Shots 9+1), .50 BMG Barrett Model 82A1 sniper rifle (p. HT115), 12-gauge Franchi SPAS-15 shotgun (use SPAS-12, p. HT112, with 6-round box magazine) and 37x112mmRB Enfield ARWEN-37 grenade launcher.

Police Officer, Los Angeles Police Department, Los Angeles, USA, 1990s

The standard patrol weapons were the 9x19mm Beretta Model 92F pistol (pp. HT108-109) and the 12-gauge Remington Model 870P shotgun (p. HT112). Since 1997, sergeants and supervisors also got a 5.56x45mm Colt M16A1 rifle (p. HT115 with RoF 3~) converted to semi-automatic fire only.

The LAPD SWAT issued a customized .45 ACP Colt M1911A1 pistol (p. HT108 with Acc 3, Shots 8+1), the 9x19mm H&K MP5A4N submachine gun (pp. HT116, SO105-106) fitted with Sure-Fire light, 5.56x45mm [Colt CAR-15A2 Model 723](#) assault carbine, 7.62x51mm H&K PSG1 sniper rifle (p. HT115), 7.62x51mm Remington Model 700 sniper rifle (p. SO100), .50 BMG Barrett Model 82A1 sniper rifle (p. HT115) and 12-gauge Benelli M1 Super 90 shotgun.

Police Officer, OMON, *Militsiya*, Russia, 1990s

OMON were SWAT-type units under command of the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs (p. SO39). Standard sidearms were the 9x18mm Izhmekh PM Makarov (p. SO98) and the 9x21mm [Tzniitochmash P-9 Gyurza](#). The 12.3x50mmR Tzniitochmash U-94 UDAR multi-purpose revolver and a number of compact machine pistols were in the inventory, including the 5.45x18mm [KBP OTs-23 Drotik](#), and even a few obsolete 9x18mm Izhmekh APS Stechkin (*Special Ops*, 1st ed., p. 104). The primary weapon of tactical teams was the 5.45x39mm Izhmash AKS-74U assault carbine (p. SO100), which was in the process of being replaced by the 9x39mm [KBP OTs-14 Groza](#) weapon system. Other long arms included the 9x39mm [Tzniitochmash ASS Val](#) suppressed assault rifle, 9x39mm [Tzniitochmash VSS Vintorez](#) suppressed sniper rifle, 7.62x54mmR Izhmash SVD *Dragunov* sniper rifle (p. SO100) and 7.62x54mmR [KBP SVU](#) sniper rifle, as well as the 85mm Kovrov RPG-7V rocket launcher (p. HT122).

Police Officer, Emergency Service Unit, New York Police Department, New York, 1990s

Each member of this SWAT-type unit was armed with a 9x19mm Glock 19 pistol (p. HT108). In a five-men entry team, the "point-man" additionally carried a 12-gauge Ithaca Model 37DS pump-action shotgun (use Remington Model 870, p. HT124) with five spare rounds strapped to the stock. He was followed by the "body bunker" with a large ballistic shield and 9x19mm Beretta Model 92D pistol (p. HT108) with muzzle-mounted Sure-Fire flashlight. The team leader and the "omni-man" had an 9x19mm H&K MP5A5N submachine gun (pp. HT116, SO105-106), fitted with Sure-Fire light. The "rear security" carried a 5.56x45mm Ruger Mini-14 semi-automatic rifle.

A counter-sniper team consisted of two men, the marksman with a modified 7.62x51mm Remington Model 700 rifle (p. SO101) and the observer/spotter with a Ruger Mini-14 rifle, both also carrying a Glock 19.

Weapon Descriptions

Batons

ASP F21, USA, 1983 (Holdout 0)

Armament Systems and Procedures produced one of the most widely used batons in service with American and foreign law enforcement, based on the *Teleskopschlagstock* developed in Germany in the 1920s and known to martial artists as *tokushu keibo* (p. CII30). It was a three-section, telescoping, spring-loaded baton that measured 21" when extended, but only 7.75" when collapsed. The ASP baton could thus be carried relatively inconspicuously, but when being extended by a sudden flick of the wrist, offered the power and reach of a full-size truncheon. The F21 was a medium size, both longer and shorter models were available. The F21 Airweight weighed only 0.6 lbs. A small mirror (\$10) could be clipped to the tip, to allow peering around corners etc.

Special Weapons

Bodyguard LE-10 Cop-Top, USA, 1980s (Holdout +1)

This was a pepper spray using Oleoresin Capsicum (OC), an inflammatory agent extracted from red pepper. OC is far more effective than the various chemical agents, taking effect after 1-3 seconds as opposed to 3-10 seconds for CN or 8-20 seconds for CS tear gas. In addition, it is more effective in cold weather and against animals and people on drugs or emotionally disturbed. A one-second spray of OC to the face means the victim must roll under HT+2 (-2 each successive dose) or immediately be rendered Blind (p. B27) and Stunned (p. B99) for 20-HT seconds. After this time the target is still at -4 to Vision and DX rolls until the effects are shaken off (a HT roll every 5 minutes; recovery usually takes 30-60 minutes). The spray can be Blocked or Dodged, but not Parried. PD from armor does not apply, but PD from shields does. Sealed armor or gas masks protect from the effects entirely. The agent was available in spray cans of various sizes, the Cop-Top being small enough to be worn on the belt. Such devices were used worldwide, including with the FBI, the LAPD and NYPD.

The Bodyguard Rescue Spray contained a disinfecting anti-inflammatory agent, relieving from the effects of pepper spray and tear gas (halve period of effectiveness); Wt 0.15 lbs, Cost \$7, 10 doses.

Tasertron TE-86, USA, 1986 (Holdout -1)

Based on the original Thomas A. Swift's Electric Rifle (TASER) of 1970 (p. HT100), this device fired two darts from a sealed plastic cartridge (the TE-86 held two cartridges). The darts did almost no damage, but transmitted a high voltage, low ampere electric current via two trailing wires, which would stun the target if he failed a Will-4 roll (tasers proved notoriously ineffective against goal-oriented individuals like martial artists). He would remain incapacitated for as long as the trigger button was pressed; the manufacturer suggested 5-10 seconds. The 7.2V Ni-Cad battery would be drained after about 100 seconds. After the current was switched off, the victim would recover in 1-30 minutes. The current would take effect through 2" of clothing or armor, and the darts didn't need to penetrate. Tasers have no negative effect on pacemakers.

Tasers like this have been in widespread service with American police forces (including the LAPD and NYPD) since the late 1970s and early 1980s, but are illegal for civilians in many U.S. states and abroad.

Pistols

Webley & Scott Police Model, 7.65x17mmSR (.32 ACP), Great Britain, 1906 (Holdout +1)

A small pocket pistol, designed for concealed carry. It was widely used as a police weapon in the British Empire after being adopted by the London Metropolitan Police in 1911, including in Adelaide (Australia), Cairo (Egypt), Dublin (Ireland) and Manchester (England). Production ceased in 1939.

Walther PP, 7.65x17mmSR (.32 ACP), Germany, 1929 (Holdout +1)

The Walther *Polizeipistole* was probably the most widespread police weapon in Europe between the 1930s and 1980s (when more powerful weapons took over). This design was the first successful double-action self-loading handgun, besides being compact and an overall neat weapon. Most European police forces issued it as a holster weapon to uniformed officers, including in Austria, Bulgaria, Denmark, France, Germany (designated the P22 from the late 1950s), Great Britain and Sweden, and many non-European countries such as Iran, Peru and Turkey, as well as most of Africa. After WWII it was used by the British SAS as a backup/undercover gun (called the L47A1) and issued to the Royal bodyguards (1960-1974). Production ceased in 1999. It was license-made in France, Hungary and Turkey, and copied by all and sundry.

While it was available in several other calibers such as .22 LR (Dam 1d+1-, Shots 10+1, 1929-1994), .25 ACP (Dam 1d-, Shots 8+1, 1929-1933), .380 ACP (Dam 2d, Shots 7+1, 1929-1999) and 9x18mm Ultra (Dam 2d+1, Shots 7+1, 1973-1979), none of these were as popular.

The smaller *Polizeipistole, Kriminal* (PPK) introduced in 1931 is described on p. HT108.

SIG-Sauer P226, 9x19mm Parabellum, Germany/Switzerland, 1983 (Holdout -1)

Based on the earlier P220 and P225, and originally developed for the U.S. military's competition for the M9 sidearm, this high-quality pistol became very popular with law enforcement agencies. Although more expensive than its competitors (the main reason why it lost out to the Beretta Model 92F with the U.S. military and to the Glock guns with many police forces), it featured exceptional reliability and good accuracy. An optional 20-round magazine was available, this was especially popular with the British SAS.

The P226 was adopted as the standard sidearm of the Arizona State Troopers, the U.S. Navy SEALs, the New Zealand military and the FBI. It was also in service with the Irish Rangers, the Israeli *Sayeret Mat'kal* and the British SAS (there known as the L105A1), and the SWAT teams of Washington D.C. and other American municipal police departments, of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, the German Frankfurt/Main police department and the Argentine and Spanish federal police. It can be seen in the hands of Special Agent Fox Mulder in *The X-Files* and bank robber Neil McCauley in *Heat*.

In 1995, it became available in .357 SIG (Dam 3d-2, Shots 13+1) and in 1998 in .40 S&W (Dam 2d+, Shots 13+1). The .357 SIG version was adopted by the Texas Rangers, the .40 S&W model was authorized for carry by the DEA and FBI in 2000.

In 1989, the P228 appeared, a slightly smaller version with shorter barrel and grip; Dam 2d+1, Wt 2.1, AWt 0.5, Shots 13+1, Holdout 0. It had a reduced magazine capacity, but could use the larger magazines of the P226.

The P228 was adopted in 1992 as the M11 by the U.S. Army for military police, flight crews, etc. Many U.S. law enforcement agencies followed suit in the early 1990s, including the DEA, FBI, Secret Service, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, the Diplomatic Security Service, the Federal Sky Marshals, and the Internal Revenue Service, as well as some police departments. The French GIGN acquired some, the British SAS adopted it as the L107A1, and it was used by police units in Germany and Switzerland.

Manufacture of the P228 ceased in 1997 in favor for the almost identical P229 (p. HT109). Some agencies replaced their P228s around that time with the P229 in .40 S&W or .357 SIG caliber, e.g. the Secret Service took it in .357 SIG.

Smith & Wesson Model 5906, 9x19mm Parabellum, USA, 1989 (Holdout -1)

A member of the third-generation of S&W pistols (based, ultimately, on the Model 59 of 1971), the stainless steel Model 5906 catered for those departments requiring a medium-priced high-capacity 9x19mm gun. The Model 5946 was double-action only, but otherwise identical.

It was not very successful outside North America, but the U.S. Capitol Police, the Georgia State Police, the departments of Atlanta and Honolulu, and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police did adopt it, among others. It has also been used by agents of the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

The 10x25mm S&W Model 1076 (1989) belonged to the same series; Malf 16, Dam 3d-2+, 1/2D 200, Max 2,200, Wt 2.8, AWt 0.5, Shots 9+1, ST 10, Rcl -2. It was only adopted by the FBI, which issued it with four 9-round, two 11-round (AWt 0.55) and one 15-round (AWt 0.7) magazine per agent. It was removed from service because of its unreliability. Production ceased in 1993.

Revolvers

Colt Official Police, 9x29mmR (.38 Special), USA, 1927 (Holdout -1)

A no-thrills double-action service weapon, available in a number of calibers, including .22 LR (Dam 1d+1-, 1930-

1946), .32-20 WCF (Dam 1d+2-, 1927-1942) and .41 LC (Dam 1d+2+, 1927-1930). It was the official service handgun of the FBI for many years, and also issued by many other police agencies. Production ceased in 1969.

Smith & Wesson Model 36 Chief's Special, 9x29mmR (.38 Special), USA, 1950 (Holdout +1)

A double-action pocket revolver built on the smallest frame available from S&W, this gun was intended for detectives and supervisors, as well as other people carrying their gun concealed. It had a "snubnose" 2" barrel. Manufacture ceased in 1999.

The weapon was widely adopted by police forces in the Western world, including in Canada, Japan and Europe. It was the first issue sidearm of the German GSG9, until replaced in the late 1970s by more powerful weapons. The Model 36 was issued by the U.S. Air Force Office of Special Investigations (OSI).

A number of variants were created, such as the Model 37 Chief's Special Airweight (1952, Wt 1.0), Model 60 Chief's Special Stainless (1965-1996), and Model 60 Chief's Special Stainless Magnum (1996). The latter was chambered for the .357 Magnum round; Dam 3d-2, 1/2D 150, Max 2,000, Wt 1.4, AWt 0.18, ST 11, Rcl -3, Cost \$500.

Tzniitochmash U-94 UDAR, 12.3x50mmR (32-gauge), Russia, 1994 (Holdout 0)

UDAR is a Russian acronym used for any self-defense device discharging an irritant aerosol. This weapon, however, was much more flexible. It was a compact double-action revolver, specifically developed for law enforcement. A range of ammunition types was available, including solid ball, an APDS armor-piercing round (Dam 1d+2(2)), a buckshot shell (Dam 1d+2, +1 to hit), a plastic baton (Dam 1d+2(0.5)+, 1/2D 15), a paintball round (Dam 1d-3(0.5), 1/2D 15) and an irritant round, which sprayed a liquid chemical agent from the muzzle (effects as tear gas, p. B132, Max 5, +1 to hit). The weapon was adopted by the Russian Ministry of the Interior (MVD).

(As an aside, the aerosol cartridges were of very simple construction, and could easily be hand-loaded (Armoury/TL7) with other liquids -- DMSO, holy water, or magical elixirs being some of the possibilities.)

Shotguns

Ithaca Auto & Burglar, 15.6x63mmR (20-gauge), USA, 1922 (Holdout -2)

Essentially a factory-made sawn-off shotgun, this double-barreled weapon had short barrels, no shoulder stock and a pistol grip. It was aimed at the police market, but also offered commercially. A vintage advertisement stated: "*Detective Harry Loose first introduced the banks in and around Chicago to use it, then its use spread to sheriffs, police departments, paymasters, watchmen, express messengers, and it's a wonderful home protector.*" Of course, the weapon was also employed by those on the other side of the law, e.g. by the infamous John Dillinger. Production ceased in 1934.

Benelli M1 Super 90, 18.5x76mmR (12-gauge), Italy, 1984 (Holdout -6)

A recoil-operated semi-automatic shotgun, famous for reliability and fast handling. It featured a full stock with pistol grip. The Benelli would chamber both normal 2.75" shells and the longer 3" Magnum loads (Dam 4d+2, Shots 6+1). Most were sold with Ghost Ring open sights (SS 11, Acc 6, +\$75). It was widely adopted by police units, including SWAT units of the LAPD, Detroit PD and Pennsylvania State Police. Other users were the *Ya'ma'm* anti-terror unit of the Israeli border guards and the British SAS.

The M1 Super 90 Entry (1992) had a short 14" barrel; SS 11, Acc 4, 1/2D 20, Wt 7.5, AWt 0.85, Shots 5+1, Holdout -5, Cost \$800/\$920.

In 1989, the M3 Super 90 was added to the line. It could optionally be fired in the pump-action mode (RoF 2~), for example if low-powered specialty munition was used; Wt 8.5, Cost \$900/1,075. It was adopted by the Australian

Federal Police, the French Marines, the Honolulu PD and the SWAT team in Munich, Germany.

The M3T (1990) had a folding stock; Wt 8.8, Holdout -5, Cost \$1,000/1,200.

SGT Tactical Response Model 90102, 18.5x76mmR (12-gauge), USA, 1991 (Holdout -6)

Scattergun Technologies produce a range of customized shotguns by modifying off-the-shelf Remington weapons. This model adopted by the FBI was based on the Model 870 pump-action shotgun (p. HT112) with 18" barrel, and could fire both normal 2.75" shells and the longer 3" Magnum loads (Dam 4d+2). It was fitted with a Sure-Fire flashlight under the muzzle, a Ghost Ring open sight and a spare rounds holder on the left side of the receiver for six shells. Discontinued in 1999.

The U.S. Border Patrol adopted the Model 90121, which had a shorter 14" barrel, larger magazine and no lamp; SS 11, 1/2D 20, Wt 9.0, AWt 1.0, Shots 6+1, Cost \$605/\$695, Holdout -5.

Submachine Guns

Haenel MP28/II, 9x19mm Parabellum, Germany, 1928 (Holdout -5)

By 1928 Hugo Schmeisser had redesigned his MP18/I (p. HT118). The main difference was the provision of a selector, allowing single shots and full automatic fire. Only box magazines were used, taking 20 (AWt 1.0), 32 or 50 (AWt 2.3) rounds. It was offered in a number of calibers, including 7.63x25mm Mauser (Dam 3d-1-, AWt 1.4, RoF 10*), 7.65x21mm Parabellum (Dam 3d-1-, AWt 1.4, RoF 9*) and .45 ACP (2d+1+, AWt 1.8, Shots 25, RoF 8*). Haenel produced only about 400, main production taking place in Belgium, where it was licensed to Pieper-Bayard. Production ceased in 1938.

In 1929 it was adopted in 7.65x21mm Parabellum by the Portuguese police and in 1934 in 9x19mm Parabellum by the Belgian Army. It was exported to China and a number of South American countries, notably Bolivia. The MP28/II was adopted by the German police and in the late 1930s also by the military police of the *Waffen-SS*. It was extensively used during the Spanish Civil War and copied in small numbers in Spain in 9x23mm Largo (same stats).

George Lanchester of Sterling Armaments (England) made some cosmetic changes, and this version was adopted in 1941 by the Royal Navy as the Lanchester Mk I (Wt 11.9, AWt 2.3, Shots 50, RoF 10*). The Mk I* was capable of burst fire only. The Lanchester Mk I* was also made in India.

Colt CAR-15 Model 635, 9x19mm Parabellum, USA, 1988 (Holdout -5)

In the 1980s, Colt brought out a submachine gun aimed at the law enforcement market. Essentially, it was a 9x19mm version of their [CAR-15](#) series of assault carbines (p. HT115), with a telescoping stock being standard. The similarity with the M16-family means that only a -1 penalty applies if unfamiliar with this particular model. Intended to compete against the H&K MP5-series, it was never able to replace the German design.

Nevertheless, it was adopted by the Drug Enforcement Agency, the U.S. Marshals Service, the U.S. Department of Energy Special Reaction Teams, the USMC Fleet Antiterrorist Security Team (FAST) companies, the state police of Connecticut and Michigan, and SWAT units of the Atlanta, Miami and Washington D.C. police departments.

Heckler & Koch MP5/10A3, 10x25mm Auto, Germany, 1992 (Holdout -4)

A variant of the popular MP5-series (pp. HT116, SO105-106), chambered for the powerful 10x25mm Auto cartridge. It used straight, clear plastic magazines and featured either a fixed plastic stock (A2) or a retractable stock (A3). The MP5/10 was offered with several trigger configurations, the standard gun fired single shots, full-automatic and 2-round limited bursts. Some 1,400 of these guns were adopted in 1994 by the FBI for SWAT and HRT units (both types of stocks). Those for field agents were incapable of full-automatic fire. One accessory offered was the KAC sound

suppressor, which could be attached without modification; stats when fitted were Wt 9.0, Holdout -5, Hearing -5.

The more common MP5/40A3 (1992) was identical, but chambered for the .40 S&W cartridge; Dam 2d+1+, 1/2D 160, Max 1,900, Wt 7.6, AWt 1.3, ST 10, Rcl -1. It was adopted by SWAT teams of the Arizona State Troopers, the Tucson PD and the Capitol Police, among others.

Production of both lines ceased in 1999 in favor for the [UMP](#).

Rifles

Remington Model 8A, 9x49mm (.35 Remington), USA, 1906 (Holdout -6)

This was one of the earliest self-loading rifles to see production, and another one of John Browning's inventions. It was available in a number of calibers, including .25 Remington (Dam 4d-1) and .30 Remington (Dam 5d). Its fixed internal box magazine was loaded from 5-round stripper clips, and the Peace Officers Equipment Co. offered a number of "police only" magazine extensions for 10, 15 or 20 rounds. It was a takedown weapon that could be broken down into two halves for easy stowage (Holdout -4). The Model 8 was available in several grades (A, C-F), which added various grades of expensive woodwork and engraving. Five thousand were made in Belgium by Fabrique Nationale.

The weapon was popular with U.S. police in the 1920s and 1930s, and such weapons were used by former Texas Ranger Frank Hamer and his posse to kill Bonnie & Clyde.

In 1936, it was replaced in production by the Model 81A Woodsmaster, which was basically identical. Production of the line ceased in 1950.

Ruger Mini-14, 5.56x45mm NATO, USA, 1973 (Holdout -6)

A semi-automatic rifle based on the action of the 7.62x51mm Springfield M14 rifle (pp. AH25, HT114). Magazines took 5 (AWt 0.25), 10 (AWt 0.47), 20 (standard until 1994, from then on for police only), 30 (AWt 1.3) or 50 (AWt 2.2) rounds. Many aftermarket accessories were available, such as a folding stock (+\$125, Holdout -5). The Mini-14 was sold in large numbers both to civilians and the police, including to the Royal Ulster Constabulary in Northern Ireland, the U.S. Border Patrol, U.S. Customs, and many prison and police services, including the NYPD, Texas Rangers and state police forces in Arizona, Georgia, Maine and New Jersey. Export customers included the Jordanian police and UAE customs police. It was license-made in France as the Humbert AMD for the *Police Nationale*. Stainless steel models (+\$50, available since 1978) were a standard weapon of *The A-Team*.

The AC-556 (1983) was a selective fire version offering single shots, full automatic and 3-round limited bursts; RoF 12**. It was also made in carbine format: The AC-556K had a short barrel and folding stock; Dam 4d, Wt 7.8, Holdout -4.

The Mini-Thirty (1987) was chambered for the Russian 7.62x39mm cartridge; Dam 5d+1, Wt 7.5, AWt 1.1, ST 10, Rcl -2.

Mauser 66SP, 7.62x51mm NATO, Germany, 1976 (Holdout -7)

A purpose-made sniper rifle based on Mauser's commercial Model 66, featuring the earlier weapon's short bolt-action. It had a select wooden stock with thumbhole grip and an integral magazine. The standard sight was a Zeiss Diavari 1.5-6x telescope, but other brands and various night sights could also be fitted. Production ceased in 1993.

The Mauser 66SP was the standard sniper rifle of the German police until first eclipsed by the H&K PSG1 in the 1980s, and later phased out in favor of more modern bolt-action rifles. It was popular with Israeli, Italian and Spanish police and military special ops units, and exported a dozen other countries.

Machine Guns

Colt-Browning R75 BAR, 7.62x63mm (.30-06 Springfield), USA, 1924 (Holdout -7)

In the 1920s, Colt introduced a modified variant of the military M1918 Browning Automatic Rifle (pp. AH25, HT118). The R75 was made to a better finish and featured a bipod and quick-change barrel, both lacking from the M1918. It was intended for commercial sales to police departments and civilians. Sales were slow, however, since the market for these guns was small and the military released many surplus M1918s for sale, which were available much cheaper. Both the Texas Rangers and the U.S. Border Patrol acquired such weapons.

Colt made a second try with the R80 Monitor in 1933. This was better suited for police use, with a shortened barrel, Cutts muzzle compensator and forward pistol grip like the Tommy gun; Dam 7d, Wt 17.9, Holdout -6. Some were acquired by the FBI and a few police departments, but it faded from the scene like its predecessor, only a few hundred having been made.

Criminals such as Clyde Barrow converted their BARs (usually stolen from National Guard armories) to a similar configuration by shortening the barrel. Barrow carried it concealed under his custom-tailored jacket, and even acquired some Fast-Draw skill with it!

Grenade Launchers

Enfield ARWEN-37, 37x112mmRB, Great Britain, 1984 (Holdout -6)

The Anti-Riot Weapon, ENfield, was a grenade launcher firing less-than-lethal munitions. It had a 5-round open cylinder revolving action, foregrip and adjustable stock. The weapon was loaded from a loading gate, but the spent cases were automatically ejected. In addition to a plastic baton, there were a tear gas munition (6-yard radius, effects as per p. B132), a smoke round (6-yard radius) and a barricade penetrator, which could penetrate an auto windshield or 0.5" of plywood, and then release a cloud of tear gas (Dam 1d++, 5-yard radius). For all rounds, a safety distance of 20 yards was advisable to minimize casualties, and hits to the head should be avoided. The gun was adopted by the British military as the L76A1, and by SWAT units in England, Canada and the USA, and even in the former East Germany!

Notes

Damage: Follows the rules in *GURPS High-Tech*, 3rd edition.

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.

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.

Batons

Name	Type	Damage	Reach	Wt	Cost	ST	TL
ASP F21, Shortsword or Short Staff	Cr	swing	1	1.1	\$65	7	7
	Cr	thrust	1				

Special Weapons

Name	Malf	Type	Damage	SS	Acc	Max	Wt	RoF	Shots	Cost	TL	
Bodyguard LE-10, Guns (Flamethrower)	crit	Spcl	Spcl	9	1	4	0.15	1	10	\$15/\$20	7	
Tasertron TE-86, Guns (Taser)	crit	Imp	1d-3 plus	Spcl	10	1	5	1.4	1	2	\$200/\$350	7

Pistols

Name	Malf	Type	Damage	SS	Acc	1/2D	Max	Wt	AWt	RoF	Shots	Cost	ST	Rcl	TL
W&S Police Model, 7.65x17mmSR, Guns (Ptl)	crit	Cr	2d-1-	10	2	100	1,300	1.5	0.25	3~	8+1	\$10/-	8	-1	6
Walther PP, 7.65x17mmSR, Guns (Ptl)	crit	Cr	2d-1-	10	2	100	1,300	1.8	0.25	3~	8+1	\$20/\$1,000	8	-1	6
SIG-Sauer P226, 9x19mm, Guns (Ptl)	ver	Cr	2d+2	10	3	150	1,800	2.25	0.6	3~	15+1	\$600/\$830	9	-1	7
S&W Model 5906, 9x19mm, Guns (Ptl)	crit	Cr	2d+2	10	3	150	1,800	2.9	0.6	3~	15+1	\$650/\$860	9	-1	7

Revolvers

Colt Official Police, 9x29mmR, Guns (Ptl)	crit	Cr	2d-1	10	3	150	1,350	2.6	0.2	3~	6	\$25/-	9	-1	6
S&W Model 36 Chief's, 9x29mmR, Guns (Ptl)	crit	Cr	1d+2	10	1	120	1,250	2.4	0.17	3~	5	\$150/\$400	9	-2	7
Tzniitochmash U-94, 12.3x50mmR, Guns (Ptl)	crit	Cr	1d+2+	10	1	100	500	2.5	0.38	3~	5	\$250/\$300	10	-2	7

Shotguns

Ithaca A&B, 15.6x63mmR, Guns (Shg)	crit	Cr	3d	10	3	15	100	1.4	0.2	2~	2	\$35/-	10	-2	6
Benelli M1 Super 90, 18.5x76mmR, Guns (Shg)	ver	Cr	4d	12	5	25	150	8.25	1.1	3~	7+1	\$750/\$890	12	-3	7
SGT Model 90102, 18.5x76mmR, Guns (Shg)	crit	Cr	4d	11	6	25	150	9.3	0.84	2~	5+1	\$770/\$895	12	-3	7

Submachine Guns

Haenel MP28/II, 9x19mm, Guns (LtAu)	crit	Cr	3d-1	10	6	160	1,900	10.3	1.5	8*	32	\$200/-	10	-1	6
Colt CAR-15 Model 635, 9x19mm, Guns (LtAu)	crit	Cr	3d-1	10	8	160	1,900	7.0	1.3	15*	32+1	\$550/\$650	10	-1	7
H&K MP5/10A3, 10x25mm, Guns (LtAu)	crit	Cr	3d+2+	10	8	200	2,200	7.8	1.5	13**	30+1	\$1,500/-	11	-2	7

Rifles

Remington Model 8A, 9x49mm, Guns (Rfl)	crit	Cr	5d+2	12	8	450	3,000	8.25	0.2	3~	5	\$55/-	10	-1	6
Ruger Mini-14, 5.56x45mm, Guns (Rfl)	crit	Cr	5d	12	10	500	3,000	7.3	0.9	3~	20+1	\$450/\$600	9	-1	7
Mauser 66SP, 7.62x51mm, Guns (Rfl)	ver	Cr	7d	15	12+2	1,200	4,200	13.6	0.17	1/2	3+1	\$3,500/-	11	-2	7

Machine Guns

Colt-Browning R75, 7.62x63mm, Guns (LtAu)	crit	Cr	7d+1	15	10	1,000	4,200	22.0	1.6	9*	20	\$175/-	11B	-2	6
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Grenade Launchers

Enfield ARWEN-37, 37x112mmRB, Guns (GL)	crit	Cr	1d-1(0.5)++	14	5	50	110	8.4	1.6	3~	5	\$1,000/\$1,200	10	-2	7
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Selected References

GURPS High-Tech and *Special Ops* are both mandatory. When looking for further details on modern guns for game purposes, Kevin Dockery's *Compendium of Modern Firearms* (1991) still proves to be the best deal for both the uninitiated and the dedicated on a budget. A number of periodicals such as *Guns & Weapons for Law Enforcement*, *SWAT Magazine*, *Jane's International Police Review* and *Special Ops: Journal of the Elite Forces & SWAT Units* are available and sometimes useful. For further sources, consult the articles "[Special Ops Weapons of Today](#)" and "[Secret Weapons.](#)" [Steve Kellams](#)' notes on cops in *GURPS* campaigns should also prove useful.

* * *

The author thanks Matt Jones and Steve Kellams for helpful comments, as well as friendly souls on GURPSnet and the Delta Green Mailing List.

The Body Control Psionic Power For *GURPS*

by Stéphane Thériault

Some people feel that the Healing power in *GURPS Psionics* is too limited. There are many examples in stories of those characters who could control not somebody else's mind or body, but his own body. For example, there was an episode of the *Bionic Woman* where someone was able to manipulate his body's functions to climb an electrified fence without any damage. So this inspired the question: What could somebody do if he could control every cell of his body individually? The answer is, pretty amazing things.

This article presents optional rules that revisit the Healing psionic powers, to change its focus from mostly healing to a more complete Body Control power. This power includes all the Healing abilities, but introduces many new abilities having to do with controlling one's own body. Metabolism Control is now the center piece of the power, and every new ability -- except for Body Monitoring and Psychic Surgery -- needs it as a prerequisite.

Most of the new abilities are suitable for normal psionic campaigns. The last two ones, Body Overdrive and Berserker Trance, should only be available in high-power cinematic games.

BODY CONTROL POWER (5 points per level)

Except for Healing, Sense Aura, and Psychic Surgery, all abilities described below can only be used on the psi himself.

Adrenaline Rush

*n/a

Prerequisite: Pain Control-15 and Strengthen

Metabolism-12

This ability gives the psi the Hyper-Strength and Combat Reflexes advantages for (Power) seconds at a cost of 1 fatigue per second. At Power 10, he also gains the High Pain Threshold advantage. Finally, at Power 20, he gets the Hyper-Reflexes advantage (cumulative with the first Combat Reflexes).

Body Monitoring *1

This skill allows a psi to monitor exactly the functioning of his own body. On a successful roll, he knows exactly what is his blood pressure, heart rhythm, body temperature, etc. He can also identify external organisms in his system. If he does a medical intervention on himself, or is able to talk to someone who's doing an intervention on him, this gives the psi a +3 on the Diagnosis rolls.

Special Enhancement: can be used on someone else; +50%

Death Control

*n/a

Prerequisite: Metabolism Control-12 and Healing-

12

Whenever the psi fail a HT roll to stay alive, he rolls immediately against his Death Control skill, at a -1 penalty for each full HT hit points he is missing. If the roll succeeds, he falls into a coma for (Power) minutes; after which, someone must make a Surgery-5 or Psychic Surgery roll, or use unnatural healing methods like magical or psionic, to keep him alive. If the roll fails, or no roll is made at all, he will die without ever waking up. If the roll succeeds, he is stabilized and will be able to recuperate normally. The psi will become scarred permanently, however, and lose one level of appearance. If he goes below -5xHT, he will need Power 20+ to just even try a roll, and the roll is at -5. No

roll can be made if the psi reaches -10 x HT.

While in the coma, the psi is still vulnerable to any kind of damage. Every time he takes additional damage, he will have to make a new roll. If he succeeds, the trance starts anew.

The life-saving roll at the end of the trance may only be attempted once.

If using magical or psionic healing instead of Surgery, the roll is considered a normal use of the appropriate healing method, but the first four hit points given are used by the body to stabilize its condition. All points after the first four raises Hit Points normally. If less than four points are given, they won't have any effect and the psi will die.

Enhanced (Sense) *n/a

Prerequisite: Metabolism Control-12

This is actually four different abilities. Possible senses are Vision, Hearing, Smell/Taste and Vision. The first three options give the psi Acute (Sense) +(Power/2). The last one gives Sensitive Touch. Duration is (Power) seconds.

Healing *3

As described in P15.

Healing Trance

Prerequisite: Metabolism Control-12 and Healing-

***n/a**

12

On a successful roll, the psi will go into a healing trance identical to deep sleep; after each (24/Power) hour of trance, he can make a HT roll to regain one HP. This is in addition to all other forms of healing, natural or not. This sleep does not, however, make him recover any fatigue. The Autotrance advantage adds its bonus to the skill roll.

Life Extension *n/a

Prerequisite: Metabolism Control-14

As described in P15.

Metabolism Control *1

As in the description in P15. If the optional Bleeding rules (B130) are used, a successful roll at -1 per 5 hit points lost will completely stop any bleeding. Finally, the psi can make his body more resistant to poison; a successful roll gives him a +1 per 5 full levels of power to his HT roll to resist poison.

Pain Control *n/a

Prerequisite: Metabolism Control-12

Everytime he takes damage, roll versus skill. On a successful roll, penalties due to damage is reduced by 1 for each level of power possessed.

Psychic Surgery *2

The psi knows instinctively how to fix any wound. A successful roll gives him a bonus of (Power/5) to any First Aid, Physician, and Surgery roll. With a sufficient power level, he can make surgeries without any equipment! This power can be used on the psi personally or on others.

If many races are present in the game's world, the psi must specialize in a given type, as explained in the Medical Skills section header on p. B56.

Sense Aura *1

As described in P16.

Strengthen Metabolism *n/a

Prerequisite: Metabolism Control-18

For a short period of time, the psi can modify the internal structure of his body to reinforce some specific trait at the cost of others. He can raise one of ST, HT, DX, or DR by 2, with a penalty of -1 to the other three, for each 10 full levels of Body Control Power. Cost is two fatigues, lost after the effect is over. The change is good for (Power/4) seconds. Note that negative DR simply means that the body is so fragile that any wound received cause additional internal damage.

Special Enhancement: The psi can concentrate the effect on one particular part of his body: head, torso, one arm, or one leg. He can get double raises for the same penalty. The penalty itself still applies to all the body. For example, a psi could raise his right arm ST by 4 at the cost of two fatigues and -1 to DX, HT and DR to his whole body. +20%.

Suspended Animation *n/a

Prerequisite: Metabolism Control-12

Allows the psi to fall into Suspended Animation (as for the spell on p. M50) for a maximum of (Power square) months at a time. The psi can, however, choose the duration of the trance, or determine certain conditions that will awake him before time. Roll is at -1 for each of these conditions.

Cinematic Abilities

These abilities are extremely powerful and are only suitable for cinematic campaigns.

Body Overdrive (M/VH) *n/a

**Prerequisite: Metabolism Control-20, Strengthen
Metabolism-20, Enhanced Senses-20, and Power-20**

This ability puts the psi's body in overdrive -- literally. For each 20 levels of Power, he gains one level of Altered Time Rate and the Enhanced Time Sense advantage for (Power) seconds. However, because almost all of his body resources are concentrated into making him go faster, it becomes more fragile. HT is reduced by 1, and he gain the Low Pain Threshold and DR-1 disadvantages for the duration of the effect. Effects are cumulative with current advantages/disadvantages (i.e. if the psi has High Pain Threshold he loses it; if he doesn't have it or Low Pain Threshold, he gains Low Pain Threshold; and if he already has Low Pain Threshold, its penalties are doubled. Same for DR). When the effect wears off, his fatigue drops to 0, and he passes out from exhaustion.

Berserker Trance (M/VH) *n/a

**Prerequisite: Body Overdrive-20, Adrenaline
Rush-20**

This ability allows the psi to enter a voluntary state of communion with the "inner Essence of the Warrior" that sleeps inside each of us. He effectively become Berserk (p. B31), but with the following bonus: he gets all the advantages of Body Overdrive without any of the disadvantages, DR +1, and all the effects of the Adrenaline Rush ability. The trance lasts for a maximum of (Power) seconds. When it wears off, his fatigue drops to 0, he loses 1 HT for each two seconds spent in the Berserker trance (round up), and he passes out.

The Autotrance advantage adds its bonus to this skill roll.

Special Enhancement: The psi always remembers who his allies are, even in the Berserk trance, and will never attack them. Special prerequisites: Will or Mental Strength at 15+, Vision roll at 15+. +50%.

Special Enhancement: Reduced Damage +20%. For each level of this enhancement, the damage the psi takes when the trance wears off is reduced by 1.

Special Enhancement: Somebody dear to the psi can try to stop his trance by trying to appease him. Make a reaction roll, at +3 if the person is especially dear to the psi (like a wife or a child), +2 if that person has the Empathy advantage. Charisma and Voice are the only other advantages/disadvantages that affect this reaction roll. On a good or better reaction, the psi snaps out of his trance. +30%.

Pyramid Review

The Witchfire Trilogy, Part Two: Shadow of the Exile (for d20)

Published by [Privateer Press](#)

Written by Matt Staroscik

Illustrated by Brian Snoddy and Matt Wilson

64 pages; \$9.95

Shadow of the Exile is the second part of the *Witchfire* trilogy of adventures set in Privateer Press' campaign world of the Iron Kingdoms. Designed for a small party of third through fifth level characters, the adventure continues on the action from *The Longest Night*. What separates the Iron Kingdoms from other more standard flavored *d20* backgrounds is its dark and grimy mixture of technology and magic, which includes steam power, guns, and large lumbering robots known as Steamjacks.

(SPOILER ALERT!)

The trilogy centres on the trade city of Corvis in the kingdom of Cygnar. In *The Longest Night*, the party travelled to Corvis, where they were asked by Father Dumas to investigate a spate of grave robberies. This led them onto the vengeful plans of a young sorceress, who happens to be Father Dumas' niece. A decade earlier, Alexia Ciannor's mother and her coven had been executed for witchcraft as part of the former King Vinter Raelthorne IV's inquisition. Though Vinter has been deposed by his brother Leto and is now thought dead, Alexia desired revenge upon both those behind the executions and the city of Corvis itself. Part of this involved stealing Witchfire, an ancient greatsword of immense power, and then raising an army of undead to bring down upon Corvis on the night of its favorite festival, known as the Longest Night.

Shadow of the Exile takes up the story a few days after the events of *The Longest Night*. Alexia has survived to continue her plans, which her uncle has divined to involve traveling deep into the bayou northeast of Corvis to the Temple of Cyriss, where it is thought she will be able to completely resurrect her mother. The easiest method of reaching the temple is by traveling on a steam-driven paddleboat. The journey will not only be plagued by inhabitants of the bayou, but also forces of the inquisition that killed Alexia's mother and now want Witchfire for themselves. Thankfully, the locals can at least be counted upon to be reasonable.

Known as the Clockwork Goddess, the worship of Cyriss has grown with the rise of technology and her temple is a large mechanical construct that can only be truly fathomed her clergy. Chasing through the clockwork building after Alexia upon the heels of the inquisition is not a little tortuous and some players may find it tedious. That said, the technology of the temple should be incomprehensible to the characters, as they will not have seen its like before. Passage is eased as both Alexia and the inquisition have worn down the clerics and servitor constructs of Cyriss as they go, but this does mean that the clerics are in no mood to talk. The final scene in the core of the temple against Alexia is straight out of *The Phantom Menace* and begins the set up for last part of the trilogy, *The Sleeping Legion*.

Having escaped the temple the party make their way back to Corvis, where much has changed. Vinter Raelthorne has returned to reclaim his throne, fully restore the inquisition and has brought with him a strange new ally that will feature in *The Sleeping Legion*. Already the inquisition has been moving against any sorcerer in Corvis. Having stopped Alexia and acquired Witchfire, the party is asked to undertake a comparatively simple rescue mission and thus bring



Shadow of the Exile to a close.

As with *The Longest Night*, *Shadow of the Exile* is another attractive book, blessed with the brooding art of Brian Snoddy and Matt Wilson. It is slightly scratchier than before, but otherwise when combined with the tight layout and choice of typeface used, works hard to evoke the dark and gritty feel of the Iron Kingdoms. Matt Staroscik's writing lightly alleviates this with its occasional touch of humor. This is not an adventure with a lot of treasure, though there are several interesting items to be found. Plus the players do end up with Witchfire, although the author advises that it isn't a toy. This is apt as it is almost as dangerous as Stormbringer!

(END SPOILER ALERT)

Besides the adventure, *Shadow of the Exile* builds upon the information we know about the Iron Kingdoms. It provides a history of the area and a gazetteer of the various small nations that they comprise. This is welcome material and will of great use to any player wanting to tie their elf, dwarf or human character into the setting. The information on areas outside of the Iron Kingdoms should prove useful for the last part of the trilogy. The appendices cover the NPCs, several new monsters -- all of which feel suited to the setting rather than as an excuse for it or to sell the book -- as well as firearms. These are necessary as it is possible for the party to get hold of some in this adventure, although it would have been nice to see some sample illustrations.

As the middle part of the trilogy, *Shadow of the Exile* echoes the tone of *The Empire Strikes Back* with its lack of a real ending. It is a tough adventure for small parties, but if a DM is looking for another adventure within the Iron Kingdoms to give them more experience, Privateer Press is selling *Fool's Errand*, a E-Venture from their website, which complements the trilogy and can be run between *The Longest Night* and *Shadow of the Exile*. *Shadow of the Exile* continues the story begun in *The Longest Night* to the same standard, breathing more life into the Iron Kingdoms and still leaving the gamer looking for more.

--Matthew Pook

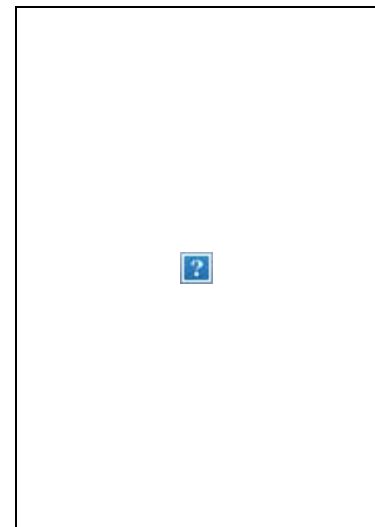
Pyramid Pick

Adventure! RPG

Published by [White Wolf Publishing, Inc.](#)

Developed by **Andrew Bates, Bruce Baugh, and Greg Stolze**

272 B&W pages; \$25.95



There's one thing I'd like to get straight about *Adventure!* before I get started. While it is a White Wolf game, it isn't a World of Darkness game. That's something I hope a lot of people keep in mind when they see *Adventure!* on their local game store's shelves. The World of Darkness manages to produce more than a few irrational reactions from people. *Adventure!* doesn't deserve to be viewed through that same cruel lens.

Adventure! is the third game in White Wolf's *Aeon Trinity* trilogy of RPGs. The first was the SF game *Trinity*, released in 1997 and set in the future of 2110. Two years later, it was followed by the contemporary superhero game *Aberrant*, which detailed a world altered by the presence of godlike super beings.

And now, *Adventure!* flashes back to the early days of the century, with two fisted heroes and mysterious mesmerists fighting devious criminal masterminds. *Adventure!* is set in 1924, with its primary focus being the Aeon Society for Gentlemen, a club for adventurers founded by Max Mercer that's been mentioned in dribs and drabs ever since *Trinity* was first released.

The first half of the book details the world of *Adventure!*, regaling the reader with the tales of the great accident at Hammersmith labs (similar to the detonation of the Galatea in *Aberrant*, it is "the moment everything changed" for the *Adventure!* setting), the founding of the Aeon Society, and detailing the allies and adversaries of the Aeon Society.

There are a trio of fiction pieces which detail the adventures of the Aeon Society. The first is written by comic scribe Warren Ellis, and the other two are by Greg Stolze. They do a good job of making the *Adventure!* world and its characters come alive.

The world of *Adventure!* is covered in fairly good detail, from its towering metropolises to its dark, dank jungles. The world is detailed country by country, detailing current events (as of the game's start date of 1924) and recent history. It also gives a lot of fun little adventure hooks, such as lost pyramids and cities, strange mechanical beasts operating in city sewers, and mysterious monsters. Some of these are presented in a section following the setting info, and others are in sidebars inside it. If stories about how *Adventure!*'s lack of support beyond the first book are true, I'm going to be disappointed. I'm sure that I'd like to have seen more of the game world, such as the gorilla who is asking for membership in the Aeon society.

The rules sections are the Storyteller system in its *Trinity/Aberrant* setting. Skills are now attached to attributes, although you can still match any attribute to any skill. Instead of variable difficulties, all rolls are difficulty 7, with task difficulties determined by the number of 7s you have to roll. Character generation, like in *Aberrant*, asks players to create their PCs as people first, and then takes them through their heroic awakening.

The energy that powers heroes in *Adventure!* is called Inspiration. Inspiration is found as one of three types: Intuitive, Reflective, and Destructive. Each of them has a different game effect. Each hero is awaked in a different vein (yes, yes, you could call them Splats, but they're definitely broader than the standard splat). The three types are daredevils, mesmerists, and stalwarts. Daredevils are heroic, capable of extraordinary feats. Mesmerists have strange mental

powers, and stalwarts are capable of feats beyond those of mortal men.

The special abilities of the heroes of *Adventure!* are called Knacks, and each type has knacks unique to them. The Knacks were great, and I can myself having a lot of fun with them in game. They also seem to refer to a few of the great heroes of the genre, leading me to wonder how easy it will be to simulate Doc Savage or the Shadow. Inspired heroes can also buy enhancements for their backgrounds; a character with Retainers 5, for example, can enhance their Retainers background to have a Legion of troops following them. A character with Resources 5 can have Wealth Beyond Avarice.

The Super Science section gives you rules to construct your own super-gadgets. The game allows for heroes to construct their own super gadgets, or to begin play with them. The only problem I have is that while there are some samples of gadget creation, there isn't a convenient section with a list of handy gadgets. I would have liked to have seen some of those, but I can imagine they would have been cut for space. I also couldn't quite figure out how you'd go about building a Rocketeer-type rocket pack, even though it is pictured on at least one occasion. Chapters Six & Seven of the rules section cover the game's systems and roleplaying in *Adventure!*, and they do a good job with both newbies and experienced roleplayers.

The chapter on Heroes and Villains lists the members of the Aeon Society. This section isn't bad, although I could have done without the photos. The villains are a fun bunch, running from distaff mad scientists to reincarnated Pharaohs to Tsarist crime lords.

Adventure! also uses a handy little Mook mechanic, giving Mook level characters three health levels, one die to roll in combat situations, and they get taken down instantly with 4 or more successes on a combat roll.

I enjoyed *Adventure!* quite a bit. I'm no Pulp crusader, threatening the livelihoods of store clerks who aren't up on their Terry and the Pirates trivia, but I've enjoyed other games in the genre, and I think *Adventure!* is probably one of the best of them I've seen. *Adventure!* manages to do two jobs very well. It is a great pulp game on its own merits, with mechanics that ring true for the pulp setting. *Adventure!* also works as part of the *Aeon Trinity* of roleplaying games, giving us looks at how the world started on its divergent path, and at the origins of a few of *Aberrant's* interesting cast of characters.

--Justin Mohareb

Pyramid Review

Eastern Territory (for Palladium Fantasy RPG)

Published by [Palladium Books](#)

Written by Steve Edwards (with Kevin Siembieda)

224 pages; \$20.95 U.S.

If you are a fan of the *Palladium Fantasy RPG* then you have undoubtedly been awaiting the release of *Eastern Territory* for some time. Palladium promised us the book a while ago, but it seemed to have hit quite a few snags in seeing print. Well, at long last the book is here, and *Palladium FRPGers* now have the source material available to make good use of that hotbed of activity known as the Eastern Territory.

The book is done in the gazetteer format that has more or less become the standard with most *Palladium FRPG* books. The book starts with an overview of the whole area, then goes through it by sub-region, and ends with a dab of monsters and magic items. The folks at Palladium have become quite adept at this style of development, and they provide another dynamic mix of places in this book, which should prove useful to most gaming groups up and down the scale.

The Eastern Territory is presented as a booming land, with lots of opportunity for adventure and little homogenous order. The nations of the Eastern Territory are bound together by a loose agreement called the Charter of Dominion, which is primarily a formal agreement on such things as trade and defense.

Most importantly, the charter outlines who within the region is recognized as a separate political entity (basically, if you sign it, then you're recognized), and it unifies these entities to a manageable enough degree to deal with foreign powers. The most important things the charter does is establish a common currency standard and establish the Merchants Guild, which pretty much runs trade within the Eastern Territory. There are provisions for a military, but the military currently established isn't much to speak of (those of some independent city-states are much more impressive).

Once one goes beyond that, the Eastern Territory is basically a collection of city-states and small kingdoms, each with their own culture and individuality. There is a very healthy variety provided -- from small towns to large and important cities -- and most gaming groups should find the locales pretty handy. There are powerful city-states such as Llor, Haven, Wisdom, and the infernal Kaash, as well as small settlements such as Sweet Creek and Greenbough.

There are a couple of particular highlights. One is the dwarven city of Northolme. This place shows us the inner workings of a true dwarven settlement, complete with maps of the entire underground expanse. We also get the secret village of Glade, which is located in no other place than within the boughs of the Tree of Life, a true Millennium Tree (an incredibly powerful and enormous mystical tree, originally presented in the *Rifts* series). Full stats are presented for the tree, and it is given a background with a nice dramatic twist.

Palladium has been doing a good job of making their books more ripe for quick adventure building, and *Eastern Territories* is no exception. There are innumerable places in the text where it reads something like, "'So and so' would be willing to hire a group of adventurers to solve this mystery . . ." In short, there are dozens of ready made situations and adventures waiting to be taken up; all the GM needs to do is tie his adventurers in and get started. The book also presents a lot more than just numbered maps. These towns and cities are full of people, and plenty of NPCs for all locations, from small to large, are presented, making them even more readily useful for adventurers.

There is source material presented too. There are a few magic items and monsters; there aren't as many as in some

other books, but they should still be handy, especially if adventuring in this area of the world. A few O.C.C.s are presented -- the Master Collector and the Holy Paladin of Rurga -- which should be useful to some. The big piece of source material is the new race -- the danzi. These elusive beings are said to be among the truly ancient races, and they were even present back as far as the Age of Chaos and were directly involved in the defeat of Netosa, one of the vile Old Ones. They suffered greatly in that conflict and in many others since, and the danzi have thus become a rather reclusive people. Most don't even know they exist, even those living right next to them.

The danzi are presented as a pretty tribal and "Earthy" type of people, who place a lot of value in courage, honor, and a more traditional (e.g. lacking in technology) lifestyle. One of their most noted trademarks is their tattoo magic. This is not exactly like the tattoo magic presented in some of the *Rifts* books. Instead of drawing off P.P.E., these tattoos siphon one's own hit points for fuel. Given that these are tattoos for warriors, most of them have combat related effects. The overall development on this section is pretty strong, although this reviewer can see the use of hit points to power the tattoos as problematic; the danzi don't have that many more hit points than other races to burn (thus, combat can become a short endeavor for the danzi tattoo warrior).

The book is also a considerable value. In a day when some publishers are charging \$19.95 for a 96-page book, seeing Palladium offer a 224-page book for \$20.95 is certainly welcome. I mean, this book really does pack it in. The layout may not be as snappy as a Wizards of the Coast release, but the wealth of material really makes it a good buy (and to be fair, the book's artwork, though not a break from the Palladium standard, is definitely solid).

On the whole, the development of the book is pretty fair. It lacks the creativity and "kewlness" of the recent work of Bill Coffin and Kevin Siembieda and there are a few points of minor inconsistencies (for example, the danzi shaman are said to *never* sell their tattoos to others without a *good* reason, and later there is an NPC presented who sells them to anyone with deep enough pockets), but there is still plenty of material to play with in this book. At the very least, it's worth it for the material on the Millennium Tree and the danzi. There isn't enough here to recommend the book to non-Palladium fans, but for those playing this game the book is a welcome addition.

--Jon Thompson

I Never Metaphor I Didn't Like

I was putting together a jigsaw puzzle with a friend the other day, and I had a realization:

I tend to believe my campaigns -- especially a lot of the good ones -- resemble jigsaw puzzles.

And then I had a realization:

It's a good thing that I wasn't making a ham sandwich instead. I mean, obviously my subconscious mind was so desperate for material, it was grabbing at any straws it could for column topics; this week could well have been about how the really good campaigns are *just* like ham sandwiches. (And then I'd need to explain to myself why I was making a ham sandwich, seeing as how I'd given up ham over a year ago . . . But I digress.)

Anyway, where was I? (*Quick reread.*) Oh, right. Jigsaw puzzles. Campaigns.

See, all my good campaigns start out with a huge heap of various pieces. But there's always an "edge" -- an immediate (and fairly easy) goal to achieve. (Yes, some jigsaw puzzle folks consider it cheating to start with the edge. I think they're nuts.) This edge helps accomplish several things. It gives both GM and players an early sense of accomplishment, it defines a boundary of what is (and isn't) possible in a strange new campaign, and it gives vague hints as to what lies inside the edges, without giving much away.

As a concrete example, my first Supers campaign first consisted of the heroes escaping from a mysterious prison. Then they needed to unravel some of the mysteries behind that prison. This took about three adventures, and whetted everyone's appetite for what was to come.

Once the frame is established, it's usually up to the players to decide what's next. They can sift through the campaign's pieces and find some that look interesting -- or easy -- to put together. (In those formative days, I don't even need to *know* what all the pieces look like! As the GM, all I need to do is make sure any pieces I introduce or change are consistent, and fit with the previous pieces.)

Ideally, the players have the option to work on different batches of pieces, either through their own subplots and goals, or through solo adventures. And, also ideally, those batches of pieces will fit together, both with what's already been established and with the other players' pieces.

Again, to draw from that Supers example, I ran a series of solo adventures for all the players. They all seemed to be unrelated . . . until they had their next group adventure. Midway through they were able to piece together that their adventures were all tied together -- except for one player's, whose adventure seemed like it was related at first, but was actually a red herring. (Good jigsaw puzzles have lots of red herrings.)

After a while, a good jigsaw feels very familiar. Sure, there may be wide patches of puzzle left to do, and there are plenty of surprises left, but on the whole you're comfortable enough with the structure to partake of the campaign in a leisurely fashion.

Then, near the end of the puzzle's life, there are really only a few unexplored areas left. But, really, this can carry its own sort of excitement. Knowing that you're the near-master of all you survey (or at least, the scope of the puzzle/world) is really pretty neat. By this point there are generally either the uninteresting parts left ("Sigh. I guess we'll see what the evil but boring wizard cult in the badlands are up to.") or the parts that are too difficult ("Ummm . . . do we feel bad enough to go after the Nation of Deathlords yet?"). But, with perseverance and dedication (and a long enough campaign timeline) even the grandest challenges can finally be exhausted.

Ideally, once the puzzle is done, there's a moment to zoom back and admire the result. Continuing the metaphor, this might be in or out of the game. Within the game it might be a [final adventure](#) that ties up the campaign. Outside of the game it might be realizing that you've told all the stories you can tell with that campaign, and reminiscing about the

good times everyone had. In the Supers campaign, I had a final adventure that tied up every loose end we could think of; the possibility was left for sequels if we wanted, but we'd all pretty much agreed that the original campaign world was done.

And then it comes time to tear the puzzle apart. This can be as simple as starting a new game (either inside or outside of the same world), or as complex as [destroying or otherwise radically altering the world](#). In the Supers world we shifted the focus, from a government team with strongly defined ideology, to a corporate team where the morality was by definition a lot more gray. (With jigsaws, is also the time when you go to the store and buy a new puzzle.)

At least, the jigsaw puzzle metaphor works for *me*.

But it may not be right for everyone. Ultimately, the point of this column is to point out that finding a metaphor for your gaming style may be helpful. It certainly was useful for me. I'm starting to formulate a new campaign now, and knowing what I'm like means I can both work towards my style (making sure I have a strong enough framework at the beginning, for example), and can tweak that style so I don't become cliched (possibly by, say, having the campaign deviate greatly from that initial framework). If you stumble across an idea that works, you can provide yourself with food for thought.

And while you're looking for metaphors, you'll probably have lots of tasty ham sandwiches in the interim.

* * *

By the by, Kenneth Hite is currently moving his entire library . . . a gargantuan task I fail to envy. Hopefully he'll be back soon with more columny strangeness.

And, as previously foretold, I'm at Dragon*Con this weekend (hopefully; I'm writing this ahead of time, and it's not impossible that I might in fact be [stuck on the side of the road](#)). So if you don't hear back from me in a timely manner, now you have at least two theories as to why.

And, since I haven't mentioned it in a while, if you have questions, comments, complaints, or compliments, please feel free to drop me a line. You can catch my eyes either [by email](#), over in the [Pyramid message boards](#), or in the [chat room](#). (I usually hang out there most evenings. But not for a few days, 'cause, y'know, I'm at Dragon*Con.)

--*Steven Marsh*

* * *

*Last week's answer: **Lord of the Fries***

(Three stars) "Often, when one thinks of festivals like Thanksgiving, Christmas, or Easter, the mind automatically jumps to turkeys, expensive presents, and chocolate eggs. Even secular holidays, like Halloween, are filled with consumption -- and it's *cute* to see little kids eating themselves sick on candy!"

The Lieutenant and the Emblazoned Champion

Two Archetypes for the *Unknown Armies RPG*

by Dylan Craig

The Lieutenant

Il duce's most trusted goodfella. The ace's wingman. The warrior's shield-bearer. Who is that figure standing alongside every holder of power? Why, it's the Lieutenant. Loyal, intelligent, and reliable, the Lieutenant is an asset on all counts to the one lucky enough to command their services. But one important feature sets the Lieutenant apart from other, similar, Archetypes: ambition. history is full of aspiring figures who turned on their masters; Lieutenants whose careers begin to outshine their boss' reign might just turn out to be the wielders of the knife which ends it.

In game terms, the Lieutenant cannot exist alone; she must be an associate of an avatar of another Archetype. A Lieutenant may only associate with one avatar at a time, although if this person dies or disappears, the Lieutenant is free to pick another avatar to work alongside -- irrespective of which Archetype that avatar embodies. For instance, a Lieutenant working alongside an avatar of the Masterless Man could transfer her allegiances to another Masterless Man, an avatar of the Necessary Servant, or any other avatar she felt capable of serving, once her original patron was out of the picture. Any restrictions on avatar choice should be as a result of the Lieutenant's personality; hence, a Lieutenant with a basically philanthropic outlook would have a hard time justifying an allegiance to a Dark Stalker, and would no doubt have to deal with the Self checks that would result, but there's nothing in the Lieutenant avatar itself to prevent it.

When chosen, a patron must have an avatar skill at least 10 points higher than her associate's Avatar: The Lieutenant skill. The process of offering service is outlined below. If the patron accepts, then from that point on, every point that the patron gains in their avatar skill is mirrored by a corresponding increase in their Lieutenant's avatar skill. In addition, the Lieutenant can draw on the patron's channels as if they were her own. The Lieutenant is subject to all the constraints, taboos, and benefits of their patron's Archetype as well as their own, and uses their Avatar: The Lieutenant skill as if it were an avatar skill of the same type as their patron's. If a patron loses points in her skill, the Lieutenant's skill doesn't drop; similarly, if the Lieutenant's behavior conflicts with her assumed Archetype, the patron's avatar skill doesn't suffer. The only direct relationship is the increase detailed above. The only time that a Lieutenant can operate against constraints of her assumed Archetype with impunity is when it comes to their role as an assistant; Lieutenants never lose avatar points for obeying orders, even if they are Lieutenants of a free-willed Archetype's avatar.

All fine and well. The complication occurs when, or if, the Lieutenant's avatar skill ever reaches a point where it is within ten points of her patron's. At this point, the Lieutenant must choose between remaining loyal, in which case her avatar skill drops to 10 points below their patron's again, or deposing, killing, or otherwise permanently removing their patron from the equation, in which case she assumes her patron's avatar skill and leaves the path of the Lieutenant forever. Note that Lieutenants inherit their patron's avatar skill level even if it was lower than their own at the point of betrayal. On the positive side, a Lieutenant is always aware of the relative avatar skill levels of herself and her patron; Lieutenants may limit their own skill increases so that the 10% cap is maintained, "out of respect to the boss," although they are powerless to prevent a drop in their patron's avatar skill from breaking this barrier.

A Lieutenant who serves a Godwalker has it somewhat easier. She don't have to worry about the 10% cap anymore, and if her patron ever achieves ascension, and her own Avatar: The Lieutenant skill exceeds 91%, she ascends to the Clergy alongside them, as the new Archetype of the Lieutenant. The character of the Archetype is set by the overall tone of the term of service of the avatar who last ascended to the role. Hence, a Lieutenant whose style of assistance involved slavish obedience to her patron would make for a very different Archetype to one who was treated as an equal.

Taboos: The Lieutenant cannot act against her patron's interests. All orders must be obeyed to the letter; however, unless directly specified, the Lieutenant may decide for herself how exactly to achieve a goal set by their patron. If a Lieutenant is ever ordered to do something in a manner which would break the taboos of their patron's Archetype, and loses points in her own avatar skill as a result, their patron loses twice as many points for giving the order. Any direct confrontation of the patron (such as an attack) immediately causes the Lieutenant's avatar skill to drop to zero.

Symbols: The tall candle, the shield, the practice of carrying another's weapons, and the forearm-grip handshake are all symbols of the close bond formed between a Lieutenant and her patron, as is a position on someone's right hand.

Significant Avatars in history: Macbeth provides one of the most well-known examples of the double-sided power of the Lieutenant, a man whose progress along the path of the Archetype of the True King (and a little help from the witches) led him to murder King Duncan and take his place, with disastrous results when he proved incapable of sustaining the demands of the role.

Channels

1-50%: A Lieutenant gains the ability to impress a potential patron with her competence. Any roll to convince someone to take on the Lieutenant's services may be flip-flopped; if the roll could already be flip-flopped as the result of some other effect, then the roll can be made on three dice instead of two, and the best possible result assembled from the result. Furthermore, the patron may not dismiss or be coerced into dismissing the Lieutenant unless they are proved disloyal (which in turn, could only happen if the Lieutenant had acted against her own avatar and lost points as a result).

51%-70%: A Lieutenant always knows when her patron wishes her presence, and gets a vague idea of their location (down to a few square miles) and basic mood when such a summons is issued.

71%-90%: A Lieutenant may reroll any one skill check, and take the best result, per mission in the pursuit of a direct order issued by her patron. This ability can be held in reserve until it is needed, but cannot be used more than once in a day.

91%+: As well as drawing on her patron's channels, a Lieutenant with this level of power may also draw on their skills. Any time that a Lieutenant fails a skill roll where her patron would have succeeded, she may immediately reroll the dice. If the result falls between her skill level and her patron's again, it is counted as a success.

Example: Sharon is an avatar of the Lieutenant whose patron, Grizzled Luiz, is an avatar of the Executioner. When their association begins, Sharon has an Avatar: The Lieutenant skill of 31%, and Luiz has an Avatar: The Executioner skill of 61%. As a result of their association, Sharon is able to draw on the first channel of the Executioner Archetype, and flip-flop her combat rolls against any target who has been named by a figure of authority for Luiz (Luiz doesn't get to nominate the targets himself; Sharon has to accept the limitations of his Archetype in this regard). After their first successful joint hit, Luiz' Avatar: The Executioner skill rises by 2%, to 63%. This results in a corresponding increase of 2% for Sharon, on top of any Experience Points she wants to spend. Sharon won't be able to channel the second level powers of the Executioner (the deaths-head stare) until her Avatar: The Lieutenant skill reaches 51%, even though Luiz can. A few dozen hits later, Luiz starts to act against his type, and his Avatar: The Executioner skill drops from 81% to 75%. This puts it only 4% away from Sharon's Avatar: The Lieutenant skill of 71%. Sharon now faces a tricky decision: either she accepts a drop in skill level to 65%, and lose access her 71%-90% channels, or she cooks up a plan to whack Luiz and take over his Avatar: The Executioner skill of 75%.

The Emblazoned Champion

Since the earliest times, warriors and crusaders have buckled on some significant piece of uniform, equipment, or ornamentation before going into battle. Thus inspired and protected, some went on to achieve superhuman successes -- whether against mundane foes or the minions of an opposing champion. This power is still available to those who would walk the path of the Emblazoned Champion today, although the tabard and silk ribbon have been exchanged for

tights and a mask, and the awed crowds of unwashed serfs now crowd the signing tables at comics conventions instead of lining the muddy fields of honor.

Anyone who follows a strict code of behavior and wears an identifying uniform while doing so may channel the power of this Avatar. However, if the uniform itself is fairly common (such as a police officer or fireman's uniform), it must include some distinctive feature which sets the wearer aside from others who wear the same uniform. This item is usually somewhat incongruous; masks are powerful items because they single out their wearer while simultaneously rendering them anonymous. Other appropriate items would be armbands, hoods, facial markings, piercings, or tattoos, unusual equipment ("A bellhop with a sword?"), and so on. If the costume itself is fantastical, these restrictions do not apply, as the wearer is sufficiently distinctive without requiring additional symbols of identification. Whatever the case, those who channel this Avatar may only do so while in costume or bearing (wielding, displaying) their totemic identifiers. At all other times, the powers bestowed by their Avatar channels are closed to them, although they still register as an Avatar for the purposes of astral sight or scrying, and still gain any passive or peripheral benefits of such status.

The second vital quantity for Avatars of this Archetype is a Code. A Code must be somehow based on a character's obsessions to achieve or allow the degree of devotion that Emblazoned Champions must represent. A Code might take the form of a long-term goal ("Bring chaos to the East Side"), required responses to certain phenomena ("Apprehend criminals whenever they are encountered"), abstract constructions ("Be just in all that you do"), or (as is usual) a mixture of these types. An Avatar's Code may grow in complexity as she increases in power, but it may never be disobeyed while in uniform. Just as an Emblazoned Champion gains none of their powers when "off duty," she suffers none of the burdens of their role. Disobedience to the Code renders a Champion powerless in a similar way to an adept who breaks a magickal taboo; the effect can be reversed, but only by devoting effort to their Code and to ritual actions designed to regenerate their power.

In fact, the similarity between adepts and Champions goes a step further. Because the Archetype demands and rewards action rather than simple obeisance from those who channel it, its Avatars must accumulate and spend "charges" much as their magickal counterparts do. These charges are also divided into minor, significant, and major charges. Some of the powers granted by a Champion's channels (which are called focused powers) require the expenditure of charges; others (which are called intrinsic powers) simply require that the Avatar possess one or more charges of a certain level, and operate more or less permanently. All powers are considered to be focused, unless they are upgraded to intrinsic status, as detailed below.

Avatars of the Emblazoned Champion who are also adepts can use the charges gained through these action to fuel their spells, but may not use magickal charges to fuel their Avatar powers. The activities which accumulate these charges are the same for all Champions, and are as follows:

Minor Charge: Further the standing of your Code in society. Lawful Champions might take steps to apprehend a fugitive or do a good deed; malicious Champions might spend an evening stalking a victim, perform a criminal act, or place another's life in jeopardy.

Significant Charge: As above, but the action must be opposed by opponents who do not subscribe to your Code. These opponents must outnumber you and any allies you have; the charge is only gained if you overcome their resistance and succeed in your intentions.

Major Charge: As above, except that the opponents you and any allies face must include another Avatar of the Emblazoned Champion who follows a different Code to you, and you must overcome this person single-handed, without any assistance.

Symbols: Surcoats, heraldic devices, masks, titles of rank (such as 'Captain' or 'Doctor'), and bright colors are all symbols of the Emblazoned Hero.

Taboos: While Emblazoned Champions do not lose charges for disobedience to their Code while out of costume, periods of inactivity weaken their connection to the Archetype. An Avatar who spends more than a few days out of costume will lose points in his Avatar skill. If this causes them to lose access to a particular channel, they cannot use

any of the powers that they were granted through that channel until they regain access to that channel. In this case, they also lose any charges that they no longer have powers of the appropriate level to use.

Suspected Avatars in History: Roland ("Orlando Furioso" -- Roland the Furious), who held the pass at Roncesvalles against the Moorish armies; Sergeant Alvin York, who performed a similar (and more successful) defense against the Germans in World War 2, and several other war heroes are the most clear candidates for being Avatars of the Emblazoned Hero.

Channels

1%-50%: Select 1 minor power from the list below. This power may not be made intrinsic, and can only be used by spending charges in the normal way.

51%-70%: Select 1 significant power from the list below, or gain a new minor power and upgrade an existing minor power.

71%-90%: Select 2 new significant powers, or two upgrades to your existing powers. Also, nominate a particular group, nation, or organization as enemies; you gain an extra significant charge whenever you defeat representatives of this group in pursuit of the goals of your Code.

91%+: As above, but all damage inflicted on you by members of this group is reduced by one grade; firearm-type attacks are thus treated as melee-type attacks, and melee-type attacks never cause more than 1 point of damage. In addition, every time you gain a charge through furthering the standing of your Code, you gain another charge of the next lowest grade for free.

Powers

A list of the most well-known powers available to Emblazoned Heroes is detailed below. GMs and players are likely to want to expand this list; inspiration is as close as the nearest copy of a superhero RPG. It is crucial to remember, though, that this is, after all, an *Unknown Armies* game; because avatars of this Archetype are drawn from people who were dressing up in superhero costumes and following bizarre codes before they started to manifest any powers, the PCs are as likely to meet Captain Golden Arches and her sidekick, Pederast Man, as they are to encounter a more standard lycra-tights-do-gooder.

Energy Projection (minor): Choose an energy form (heat, cold, telekinesis). Maximum range of 15 meters; if used offensively, does damage like a melee attack. Can also be used to levitate light objects (less than 10 kilograms). Manipulation or delicate work is handled using your Avatar: Emblazoned Hero skill or some other appropriate skill (such as Juggling or Welding), whichever is higher. Energy blasts can only be dodged if the target's Dodge skill is higher than your Avatar: Emblazoned Hero skill, and even then only on a successful Dodge roll.

Gadgeteer (minor): You may create minor gizmos using the Mechanomancy rules as a template, rolling on your Avatar: Emblazoned Hero skill to determine success. If you already have an appropriate skill for building such items, you may flip-flop it every time your Gadgeteer power is activated. Alternately, if you are already a Mechanomancer or have the ability to flip-flop gadget-building rolls, you can now roll three dice for such tasks, and put together the best result possible whenever this power is in effect.

Toughness (minor): Every time you activate your Toughness power, you gain 10 Wound Points, which last ten minutes. At the end of the ten minutes, you lose these points, so if a fight leaves you badly injured, it would be a good idea to seek medical help before the reserves of endurance provided by this power run out, leaving you dead on your feet.

Leap (minor): You gain the ability to leap massive distances. Every time this power is activated, make a Body roll. If successful, you travel ten meters, plus a number of meters equal to the sum of the dice. If you fail, you only travel as many meters as the lower of the two dice. In either case, halve the distance if you are jumping straight up or didn't take

a run-up. In-flight acrobatics and treacherous landings are handled using your Avatar: Emblazoned Hero skill or an appropriate Speed skill (such as General Athletics), whichever is higher.

Enhanced Skill (minor): Every time this power is triggered, you gain a +10 shift to all rolls on the Skill you nominated when you chose this power. The bonuses are cumulative, and last one minute.

Flight (significant): Allows speeds of up to 100 kph, plus your Speed attribute. Aerial maneuvers are handled using your Avatar: Emblazoned Hero skill or some other appropriate skill (such as Acrobatics), whichever is higher. You can fly for as many minutes as your Body attribute before having to touch down and spend another charge.

Mind Control (significant): Handle using the rules for similar adept spells; generally, you have to roll higher than your target's Mind (or Soul) and under your Avatar: Emblazoned Hero skill (or another appropriate skill such as Hypnosis, whichever is higher) in order to succeed, with shifts of -10, -20, and -30 for trying to simultaneously affect successively larger groups of people.

Invulnerability (significant): Like Toughness, Invulnerability grants a reserve of Wound Points, but these are treated as a "buffer," and don't disappear after ten minutes. Also, each use of the power grants 20 Wound Points instead of 10.

Enhanced Attribute (significant): Every time this power is triggered, you gain a cumulative +10 shift to all rolls on the Attribute you nominated when you chose this power. The bonuses are cumulative, and last one minute.

Upgrades

Powers may be bundled with upgrades when they are first selected, or upgraded at a later stage when a new channel is attained. In either case, each upgrade increases the level of charge required for the use of the power by one level, so that a minor power with a single upgrade functions like a significant power, and requires significant charges.

Intrinsic: All the powers listed above are listed in their focused form. Selecting this upgrade means that you don't need to spend a charge of the appropriate type to power the skill; you can use it as often as you like (within reason), as long as you're carrying a charge of that level.

Enhanced Effect: Kicks the output of the power through the roof. Gadgeteers may now create significant artifacts; Energy Projection does firearm-style damage or levitates up to 500 kilograms; the maximum distance of a Leap and the maximum speed of Flight are multiplied by five; enhanced skills or attributes get a +30 shift, Toughness becomes Invulnerability, and Invulnerability becomes literal invulnerability. Mind Control rolls against a single target may be flip-flopped (or rolled on 3 dice if they could already be flip-flopped), and the power can be used against small groups (as many targets as the first digit of your Avatar: Emblazoned Hero skill) with no negative shift.

Enhanced Duration/Mastery: Easy enough. Any power with a duration now has five times that duration; any instant/once-off-type power (Gadgeteer, Energy Projection, Leap) can be used twice in the time it would usually take to do it once -- hence, two leaps or energy bolts per round, or two gizmos in the time it would take to build one.

Restriction: Not an "upgrade" as such, but a feature of a power which serves to limit its effectiveness and thus brings it down a notch in terms of the type of charge needed to make it happen. This restriction prevents the power from working at all, and should occur in about 50% of cases. Suitable examples might be: unable to use the power in daylight/at night, unable to use the power on living matter, and so on. Alternately, any restriction which mimics another upgrade, but in reverse (restricted effect, restricted duration etc.), is fair enough. Such a restriction must be in effect constantly; if the use powers with restricted mastery (which take twice as long to accomplish) are interrupted in midstream, they fail and any charges spent on powering them are used up.

Epic Fantasy Campaigns On Low Magic Worlds

by Brent Knowles

An epic fantasy campaign must involve the players, must make them care about their characters, and must enthrall them with a moving story. A gamemaster should not overwhelm the players with magical artifacts, nor constantly confuse them with newly designed monsters. Players will get more out of a solidly designed campaign with a rich story.

Magic-heavy campaigns have a tendency to rely too much on "things" and not enough on the story, meaning that the only way players are interested in the campaign is if they continue to get new items and hoards of gold (a.k.a. a Monty Hall campaign). Eventually the campaign becomes unbalanced and the players stop having fun. A story-heavy campaign, on the other hand, can keep the campaign world fresh. A gamemaster may safely introduce new story elements into a campaign without overbalancing the game; the same cannot be said for adding new magical items. This article is a brief summary of techniques that may be used to run a low-magic, story-heavy campaign.

First, the GM must establish the low-magic world, explaining its eccentricities, and its uniqueness. Then the gamemaster develops the overall story, deciding on a Hero, the Hero's Companions, and a Villain. Next the prepared GM will decide the frequency and power of magical items. This article includes a few suggestions for making "unique" magic items that will grow as the characters advance in power. Finally, the GM must learn how to carry the story, supplying the appropriate twists and turns to make the story believable and interesting. With these techniques and a little imagination, any GM will be able to create epic campaigns.

The World: Where Has The Magic Gone?

This is the first question that needs to be answered in any low-magic campaign. The answer chosen here will determine the nature and the rules of the campaign world. Did magic-draining creatures swarm the lands, destroying wizards and devouring artifacts? Did a Hero of long ago tear the heart of magic from the world, banishing all sorcerers, good or evil? Maybe the world has never known magic.

In a world once heavy in the magical arts, there might be rare magical items scattered throughout the land, ranging from potions of healing to the most powerful of artifacts. Few know how to make new magical items, thus making those items that exist more valuable. Perhaps in this world the use of magic -- and hence the possession of magical items -- is illegal, punishable by death. This sort of society would force magic onto the black market.

In a low-magic world, magical items should never be randomly determined; the gamemaster should always place them with forethought. A potion of healing on the third level of a dungeon? Why? Perhaps a true Priestess had made her way there, only to meet with death at the hands of a mysterious beast -- the potion laid to rest with her. When the players do find magical items they will be careful to preserve them until they are needed. If the properties of the item have been well planned out, its use will almost be predetermined.

The Hero

As roleplaying is a group event, seldom is it that a campaign revolves around a single individual, although this is most often the case with the fantasy literature from which roleplaying evolved. However, a campaign that does concentrate on an individual as the protagonist allows the GM an opportunity to "write" an epic story, one full of emotion and excitement. Not only will the player playing the Hero enjoy herself more, but so will the other characters, as they find their roles and their lives intertwined with that of the Hero. The campaign, when played through to its conclusion, will be a thing of beauty and one your players will never forget.

There is no True Way to start a campaign, but a proven technique, in fiction and in fantasy roleplaying, is to start the

players in the action, right after a major, life changing moment has occurred. The Hero's family has been murdered, her kingdom sacked, or the Hero begins a long quest to find the secret about her past. The odds are stacked against the Hero.

Such a scenario gives a player something to work up from. In the beginning, the Hero merely seeks revenge, or knowledge of her family, or some other clearly defined ambition. As the campaign progresses she realizes that particular persons, organizations, or creatures are against her, or are performing the Great Evil. She must assemble a trustworthy crew of comrades -- warriors and priests, rogues and wizards -- who will help her to overthrow the Great Evil.

The Hero's life should be the central focus of the campaign. This is not to say that the GM should write all the adventures to be exclusively tailored to the Hero. At times the gamemaster will need to write sub-quests involving the other characters. These may be stand-alone adventures, with or without relation to the main plot.

The Companions and Side-Adventures

(or, Other Classes and the Hero)

Having one character as the central protagonist is great in novels and can be used effectively in campaigns as well. The key thing to note is that the other players want to have fun as well, and want to feel involved in the campaign. The easiest way to do this is to side them with the Hero against the Villain. Make the entire party despise or fear the Villain (or at least be extremely curious as to the true motivations of the Villain).

Perhaps a Ranger joins the Hero's cause and helps her thwart one of the Villain's plans. The Ranger intends to return to his forest grove after one adventure. However, on his return he discovers the forest burning and now the party must help him save it. They may even discover that the Villain's minions were behind the fire, taking revenge for the Ranger's involvement against them. Now, regardless of his like or dislike of the Hero, the Ranger shares a common enemy with her.

In a group setting it is difficult to focus on just one character to be the Hero. The GM should give all party members individual adventures appropriate to what they enjoy, but keeping in mind that the larger framework involves the Hero and the Hero's story. The rest of the party is the supporting cast for the Hero's story. Fighters may follow the Hero for glory, thieves for the potential loot. Due to special considerations inherent in a low-magic world, mages and priests need "unique" reasons to journey with a Hero.

The Mage

Behind the flaps of a blue tent, the Hero meets with a man known simply as the Seer. The Hero asks, "I seek the way to the Gnarled Grove. What words have you to guide me?"

The Seer, a wizened old man half-hidden in the folds of a black velvet robe, speaks quietly, making the Hero lean forward to hear the words: "Seek first the Forest Wizard, in the hills to the North of Thesan. He you must trust to find the true Way."

"A wizard?" the Hero makes no attempt to hide her disgust, "I carry no great liking of them!"

"To open the Way you must abandon your old notions and accept the Wizard, as both companion and friend. Else your family's death means nothing and the Way is lost . . ."

Thus a wizard can be introduced to the group, overriding any campaign-created restrictions that might make other characters reluctant to travel with one who holds sway over the arcane arts. They may not want to have a wizard join them, but they will accept him, if it seems to be the only route to victory. Still the player playing a mage must understand that this class has certain restrictions in a low-magic campaign.

It should be exceedingly difficult for mages in the low-magic campaign to learn new magical spells. Certain powerful spells should require the wizard to embark on dangerous adventures to learn them. That said though, the magic available to the mage (even that of the lowest levels) should have a greater impact than magic in a standard campaign.

Example: A band of brigands intercepts the party while travelling through a narrow canyon. The party is surrounded and outnumbered two to one. But as luck would have it, Relonar, the party mage had found a scroll of Sleep several weeks back after the party defeated Baron Mitchel. Relonar had copied the scroll into his spell book, but until this moment hadn't needed to use it.

Relonar, nervous about whether the spell will work, casts it. Three of the men fall to the ground and the others panic, never having seen such a display of magic before. They leave their comrades behind as they flee.

In a standard fantasy campaign the magic would have been just another part of a typical combat encounter, much as swinging a sword or firing an arrow is. In a low-magic campaign, magic use of any kind should put at least a measure of fear into the hearts of those who see it. Imagine the above encounter from the point of view of the brigands: they find a group of wanderers (easy pickings!) and then the guy in a funny red robe mutters some words and waves his hand about. BAM! Three of the group lie in the dust, and those who didn't fall have no idea whether their comrades are alive or dead. They don't plan to wait and find out.

The growing need for the magician in the party to learn new spells would easily lead the party through a series of adventures, supplementing the quests undertaken by the Hero, and those of the other party members.

How can a mage join the Hero?

- The mage is considered necessary for either an immediate quest the Hero is embarking upon or for the campaign in general.
- The Hero witnesses an attempted execution of a wizard and intervenes, thus gaining the loyalty of the wizard and the responsibility to protect him.
- The mage joins the party under disguise, pretending to be another character class and only reveals his powers when the party is in mortal danger.

Priests and Druids

In the low magic world, priests and other "miracle workers" should be given the same powers as in a normal campaign. The only difference is that spell casting clerics should be looked upon as somehow different from the average clergy (which should have little or no spell casting ability). To some in the cleric's church they might be considered as avatars, saints, or blessed individuals. To others they might seem a threat to the traditional power structure of the church and thus considered expendable.

Either way a cleric will most likely be an outcast from the rest of society (much like a mage) and quite possibly an outlaw, hunted by the traditional church.

How can a cleric join the Hero?

- A boyhood friend entered the clergy a couple years ago and hasn't been heard from until he stumbles upon the Hero's door, badly beaten and exhausted. During his time with the church, his powers were revealed and he was pronounced a warlock. He barely escaped with his life, and the church is hunting for him now.
- One way to get enchanted weapons may be to have a cleric bless them. The party might seek out one such Holy Man. Upon seeing the party, the Holy Man has a vision, and realizes his true place is with the Hero.

The Villain (and minions)

There are a couple tactics to use in introducing enemies to the party. In the beginning keep it strictly to humans and maybe minor humanoids (goblins, orcs, and so on). Again, the back story will determine what is appropriate. In a

duchy where non-humans have not been seen for centuries, it will be unlikely to stumble across even goblins. The return of such creatures would reveal a great evil at work.

Secondly, don't shy away from having the party meet creatures far too powerful for them to beat in combat -- if it serves the story. What if, when the party is low in power, they run into a troll? Keep combat down to a few rounds and then have the troll retreat, the Villain calling him elsewhere. This will not only display the power of the Villain, but also her apparent disregard for the threat the party presents to her. It also makes the player's realize that combat won't be the only way to "defeat" powerful adversaries in your campaign.

When the party can't defeat certain creatures in standard combat, introduce other opportunities to interact with them. A necessary passage through the dangerous Forests of Ever might require tricking a band of ettins into escorting the party to safety. An all-out battle would result in the deaths of the entire party, whereas trickery might keep the party alive and further their own interests.

If you have one major Villain in the campaign, make him (or her) powerful. Have the party quake at the thought of ever meeting her in combat -- yet they know that one day they must. Have the party walk through villages massacred by the Villain's armies, meet families torn apart by the Villain, and learn of the terrible evils planned by the Villain. Gradually as the campaign grows let the party have small victories -- at a cost. The party has just stopped the train of supplies leading to the Villain's main army? Have the Villain strike back with an attack against the family of a party member.

Also, if appropriate to your campaign, make the Villain's character sympathetic, so that one or two of the players might feel sorry for the Villain. They might learn of the Villain's past and the cruel circumstances of fate that forged her into the monster she now is. The sympathy should not interfere with the party's goal of stopping her, but it might add an emotional undercurrent to the final combat.

A word about fairness: if the players are to be restricted in the amount of magic items they have, and the spells they have access to, then so should the monsters, NPCs, and Villains that the party encounters. Your players will quickly become angry if it seems every other person in the world has access to "rare" magical items and spells except for themselves.

Evolving Magical Items

Magic items should be rare, for both the players and the non-player characters. When the party is relatively new, even finding a healing potion could be considered a major haul. Yet such a heavy restriction limits the sense of wonder the players might have, in regards to discovering new and exciting items. One way to handle this is to introduce one or two items to the party that improve as the characters gain levels.

Perhaps the Hero is a fighter and receives a hereditary shield once he reaches second level. To begin with, the item appears normal, even though the party wizard detects "hidden" enchantments upon it. As the Hero gains levels though, the shield becomes more powerful, its enchantments finally revealed.

The rate of increase that the item receives abilities should be balanced by the gamemaster, and should be specific to the campaign. The gamemaster also has to decide if only the character that received the item can benefit from the enchantments, or if others may wield the item as well.

Some tips to keep in mind when using magic items in a low-magic campaign:

- Make magic items useful to advance the story, not just to aid the party in combat. Perhaps the potion of invisibility is the only good way to sneak into the castle, or the potion of speed necessary to win a footrace against an "impossible to beat" monster.
- If you introduce powerful magical items into the campaign make sure that they have charges and/or a duration for their special abilities. You might give a fighter a long sword with powerful combat abilities, but limit the sword such that there is a 10% chance each battle that it will shatter.

Suspense and Twists

The whole nature of a campaign of this sort is to slowly reveal the world . . . both its magical content and its story. The Villain need not be introduced until the Hero has risen in power. Perhaps there is a false Villain, and it later turns out that the true Villain is someone else, someone completely unexpected. Unveil the interesting details of the world like a suspense novel, and make the players want to come back for more. For example, instead of throwing every 'interesting' monster at the players in the first few sessions, start with a staple of human and humanoid creatures. Only as the players rediscover the lost magical areas of the world will they encounter the more nightmarish monsters.

A low-magic campaign gives the gamemaster the opportunity to slowly unveil the magical workings of the world. The very fact that the world has little magic speaks volumes about the world's political and social infrastructure. Hundreds of adventures might be spawned from the simple premise of a low-magic world. Nations may war with each other for the few artifacts that remain in the world, governments may topple when priests use their abilities to challenge dictatorships, and wizards might return to the world, bent on gaining revenge for eons of exile.

A major problem with a campaign based upon one character (like the Hero) is that the character might not survive. Perhaps the young Hero's party is overwhelmed by a band of ogres and thanks to some bad dice rolls the Hero is slain. The gamemaster might "force" the party to resurrect the Hero, or have a helpful Healer come wandering by to help, or fudge rolls to keep the hero from dying. But these are just a few options. Maybe it turns out that the Hero was not the True Hero that the legendary seers foresaw. Perhaps the death of this Hero allows a new Hero to finish the quest. Maybe it is now up to the rest of the party to carry on the Hero's quest.

Conclusion

What would compel a GM to run a low-magic world such as this? Perhaps, the current campaign is stale, the players have fought every creature in all the source material (and memorized their statistics), or everyone just wants to try something different. Now it is time to focus on the world and the story. Use the monsters and magical items to heighten the story . . . not to carry it.

This kind of campaign won't appeal to every adventuring group. Those who constantly need to discover powerful items and fight thousands of monsters probably won't enjoy a low-magic campaign. But any player who thrives on a good story and great character development will love a well ran campaign of this sort.

The major emphasis of this type of campaign is story. A good campaign world should feel alive to the players, much as the words of Tolkien made his world live for his readers. Spawn your adventures from your world and make the players feel like they both influence the world and that it influences them.

Adventuring Hooks

- The Hero works for the Council of Non-Magic and must stop a crazy priest from resurrecting the Eight Gods of Magic. Eventually the Hero realizes that the crazy priest is right -- it is necessary to resurrect the gods to defeat an even greater evil that will soon threaten the land.
- In a world where magic has never been known, a Gate opens and a wizard arrives. He has fled from a world overrun by evil. He has come to this new world to warn its people and prepare them for an evil they fear to understand. An evil birthed by magic, an evil that can only be defeated in turn by the same magic that created it.

"Gesundheit!"

Allergy: A New Disadvantage for GURPS

by Andrew J. Sheldon

Tired of the same old disadvantages for your PCs? Is your world populated with Bad Tempered Paranoids with Combat Paralysis? Are you weary of playing pathetically old (or ridiculously young) "warriors" whose Stubbornness and Stuttering make them the pariah of every campaign? How about that Fat Eunuch with Gigantism you tried to pass off as a wizard?

Try these optional rules for allergies. Lots of folks have them, and you can be very creative with both the allergen and the response. You GMs could have lots of fun tormenting the PCs. Your everyday mold allergy can be a serious disadvantage . . . if you're trying to sneak out of a cave filled with sleeping Orcs and their stinky sweaty clothes, all just waiting to send your nose into sneezing fits! Or you're allergic to the fragrance they put in perfumes and hair spray. Just as you're about to kick your Sex Appeal into action with the heiress, to get her to spill the combination of the wall safe . . . you get a whiff of her perfume! Your face begins to swell, your nose starts gushing, and your eyes run like you've been slicing onions!

Sounds so much more interesting that your typical Berserker PC with Dwarfism and Megalomania, doesn't it?

Allergy

Variable

You are allergic to something. Allergies come in all shapes and sizes. They are limited only by your imagination and playability in the eyes of the GM. They may include: Bee-sting/insect venom, fruit/nectar/nuts (specify fruit/nuts or family of fruits), chocolate, pollen, wool, dust, mold, dogs, cats (usually cat dander), horses, synthetic fibers, natural fibers, certain kinds of wood, mutton, alcohol, mana, metals, plastics, hair spray, fragrances (colognes, perfumes, etc.) And so on. It is an extremely rare condition but some people are actually allergic to light. Other "rare" types of allergies: strong magnetic fields, certain types of radiation or other energy waves. (GMs, handle this with care).

Effects can vary widely, so be creative. Possibilities include: sneezing, itching, swelling, hives, boils, loss of voice, stroke, blindness, deafness, loss of muscle control, loss of sphincter control, vomiting, rash, impotence, gastro-intestinal distress, cardio-pulmonary distress, anaphylactic shock and more. The more severe the reaction, the greater the point bonus.

The severity of the reaction determines the basic point bonus and the HT roll to resist. The four different levels of Allergy are Minuscule, Minor, Major, and Severe.

Minuscule: You have a minuscule but annoying reaction on contact or ingestion or inhalation with the reactant (e.g. eating chocolate makes you sneeze). You are at no HT modifier to resist. Effects last for 2d turns. *-1 point.*

Minor: You have a minor reaction to the allergen. Examples include mild rash, limited nerve inflammation (it hurts to touch the affected area), prolonged sneezing, headache, or minor swelling. You are at -1 HT to resist. If you miss your HT roll and a limb is affected, any use of that limb is reduced. For arms and hands, any action requiring a DX or skill roll will be at -2. If a leg is affected, Move and Dodge are reduced by 2. Facial reactions reduce vision rolls by 2, or may even hamper your ability to speak clearly. Others may be put-off by your swollen and puffy face, so expect a -1 Reaction from people meeting you for the first time. Effects last for 1d minutes. *-5 points.*

Major: You have a major reaction to the allergen. Examples include gastro-intestinal discomfort (bad, painful gas and bloating), minor nerve inflammation (it hurts to use the affected body part), hives, or major swelling. You are at -2 HT

to resist, and are -4 on DX and skill rolls and -3 Move/Dodge while under its effects. Facial effects could include complete closure of one or both eyes (resulting in temporary blindness!). Any visible hives or swelling will induce a -2 reaction from people meeting you for the first time, and -1 from people who already know you. Bad gas will also get you a -2 reaction! Effects last for 2d minutes. *-15 points.*

Severe: You have a severe, life-threatening reaction, like cardio-vascular or gastro-intestinal distress, anaphylactic shock, or major nerve inflammation (it hurts to live). You are at -5 HT to resist. If you fail your roll HT roll by more than 3 you will fall unconscious. You will die in 3d minutes unless you get medical attention. If you fail by 2 or less, you will be at -6 for *every* action you take, and your Move will be reduced to 1 for 3d minutes! Even if you make the roll, you will be at -2 for all DX and skill rolls for 3d turns. *-15 points in TL7+, -20 for TL6.*

Note: in TL7 and above, medicines exist to counter the effects of even the least severe allergies (e.g. bee sting kits, antihistamines, etc.). Above TL8, it's GMs discretion whether to even allow allergies as disadvantages or not due to advances in genetics and medicine.

Rapid Healing will cut in half the duration of all allergic reactions. Immunity to Disease will not. In fact, Immunity to Disease will increase the severity of your reaction, since allergic reactions are an immune system response! Immunity to Disease bumps your reactions to the next highest level of allergy. If you take Severe Allergy and Immunity to Disease, you'll be rolling at -10 HT to resist, and if you fail at all, you're dead in 3d seconds barring immediate medical attention available only at TL7+.

A Critical Miss on your HT roll bumps up the severity of your reaction by one level for that incident only. For those with Severe Allergy, a Critical Miss means death.

If your GM will allow it, you may add further realism by the use of modifiers. Modifiers would not be available for minuscule or minor allergies, but fully applicable to major and severe ones.

Modifiers

- If the substance is very common, the disadvantage is worth an additional *-5 points.*
- If the substance is uncommon, take no additional points.
- If the substance is rare, *+5 points.*
- If it is possible to avoid contact (e.g. not eating the Salmon Mousse), *+5 points.*

Examples:

- Gorgor the Terrible, human tank, is allergic to spider venom. Major Allergy (Spider Venom): -10 points. Spiders are common; you can find them anywhere, anytime, providing an additional -5 point bonus. If bitten, the venom will cause Gorgor's skin to swell and get extremely tender in the affected area. He would lose his effectiveness with his greatsword. Spiders are usually very small and hard to see. Gorgor might not even notice one is inside his plate mail until it's too late. Total value for Gorgor's Major Allergy: Spider Venom: -15 points. (This particular allergy might go well with Arachnophobia . . .)
- Karl "The Glove" San Giacomo, bag man for the Carpeccione family, is very allergic to peaches. Severe Allergy (Peaches): -15 points for TL7 (Death unless treated). Peaches are uncommon -- you can only find them in certain temperate zones at certain times of the year, subject to GMs approval -- no additional bonus, but when you see them, you don't have to eat them (unless you really really love them, like Karl, in which case make a Will roll). Ingestion causes instant constriction of Karl's air passages and blood vessels (anaphylactic shock), for which his TL7 doctor has provided an inhaler . . . if he can get to it quickly enough. Total points for Karl's Severe Allergy (Peaches) is -10 points for TL7 (Death or medication). If Karl lived in TL6 or less, it would be Death by Peaches: -15 points. In any case, Karl would be smart to just avoid the fruit. Of course, if he didn't know there was peach nectar in that fruit punch at "Boss Man" Carpeccione's daughter's wedding

It is possible to be allergic to several different substances, or to a family of substances. Each allergy must be bought separately. Allergies can only be "bought off" in TL8+, by either medicine or genetic tampering (once again, subject to

GM's discretion).

So try an allergy for your next character. It'll add a further touch of realism and variety to your campaign and make role-playing a lot more fun. So, take a box of tissues with you. Happy Gaming, and Gesundheit!

Pyramid Review

Little Fears RPG

Published by [Key 20 Publishing](#)

Written by Jason L. Blair

Illustrated by Andrew Baker, Dimitrios "Jim" Denaxas, Hive, Julie Hoverson, Veronica V. Jones, Bradley K. McDevitt, Nick Wilson & Kieran J. Yanner

144-page 7.5" x 9.5" Soft cover; \$20

Key 20 Publishing's first game is not one for the timid or for those that are easily offended. In setting out to provide a rationale for the disappearance of thousands of children each day in the USA, it deals with the taboo subjects of child abuse, pedophilia, and cannibalism. If these issues are too strong for your sensibilities, then *Little Fears* is not the game for you, and understandably so. You need read no further.

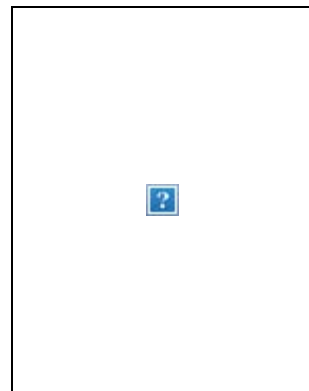
Their unsavory nature notwithstanding, *Little Fears* approaches these topics with a great deal of care. It is clear from both the writing within the game, and from his own Designer's Notes at the end of *Little Fears*, that the author is as equally disturbed as we should be by such inhuman acts.

Little Fears is a game about childhood. Not the childhood seen through the rose-tinted memories held in adulthood, but a game in which all of those unknowns -- the ones you were afraid of and can now rationalize and laugh off -- are real. There are things out there that go bump in the night, and they are out to get you. These are the monsters from Closetland that have been forgotten by almost every rational adult. This is the basic premise of *Little Fears, the Roleplaying Game of Childhood Terror*.

Physically *Little Fears* is an ominously dark little book in an odd format. The writing, laid out against a shadowy background, is generally clear and easy to read, but not without the occasional error. The art is dominated by eerie double page spreads that are reminiscent of the work of Dave McKean. Elsewhere the smaller illustrations try to follow this style, but are not as spooky. A good part of the interior art is too obvious and does not fit the general style of the book. As an aside, the game is perhaps a little over priced for what you get.

In *Little Fears* the characters are ordinary children between the ages of six and twelve. Each day they face the irrational fears to which an adult would apply a far more rational explanation. Such fears manifest from just one place -- Closetland. These monsters do not necessarily come out at night, though they do prefer the shadows, nor do they appear straight out of the closet in your bedroom, though this their preferred means of entry into this world. Although some monsters work to their own ends, most serve the Demagogue, the ruler of Closetland, who is a product of -- and the source of -- childhood fear.

A child is extremely unlikely to face the Demagogue, confronting instead the Seven Kings and their minions. The Kings stand beside the Demagogue, and each governs one aspect of the fears that children are subject to. These are in essence the seven deadly sins, so that we have The Bogeyman, King of Greed; Titania, King of Pride; Rael-Schol, King of Envy; Lamashu, King of Wrath, wife to the Demagogue and mother of Kabaelza, the King of Sloth; Baba Yaga, King of Gluttony; and the Defiler, King of Lust. Many of these are familiar and should perhaps be used to draw the characters into the game, before exposing them to the other Kings. An additional figure, Branxis the Enslaver, who is the Demagogue's right-hand man and sees to the construction of Closetland, brings this pantheon to a total of nine,



and gives us a childhood version of the nine circles of hell.

Each of the Kings (bar the Defiler, who works alone) has their minions and monsters, which they can send to cause fear in our children. This can be a direct manifestation, or something as simple as a tap on the window or noises behind the walls of your home. Worse still, they can take over and influence the behavior of adults and other children to cause more doubt, fear, and uncertainty. Besides a few of the more "normal" monsters such as vampires (which strangely turn to stone upon destruction) and werewolves, there are no statistics given for Closetland monsters. In keeping with a game that has children confronting and overcoming their fears, it is child's own fear score that provides any necessary statistic for the monster itself.

Creating a character is a relatively simple affair; each player has six points to spend on improving the six stats of Smarts, Muscle, Hands, Feet, and Spirit, each rated from one to five, and starting at a base of two. Positive qualities (such as Favorite Child, Bookworm and Horror Buff) are purchased, while negative qualities (Bed Wetter, Class Clown, and Whiny) give more points to spend. At the same time, the character sheet, which looks like a crumpled sheet of paper, asks a number of important questions: what you do and don't like, favorite possession, what you do when you are scared, what you are scared of, and so on. These are important as they help define the child and are revisited in the GM's section on running the game. There are no skills within the game; instead both GM and player decide what their character might know as necessary.

Children also have three virtues -- Soul, Innocence, and Fear -- which range from zero to ten. Soul begins at ten and can be lost through the Darkening, an encroaching tainting of the child's soul, but gained through personal acts of faith, which can be religious if the child believes this to be important. Innocence is determined by age; a child has less as they grow older, invariably losing all by the time that they are thirteen. At this point you are Blind to the fear and effect of Closetland. It can also be lost through traumatic acts, worse if it is the child that commits such acts. Fear begins at zero and can be gained through failed Fear rolls or possession by a King or its minions. Like Soul, it can be lost through acts of faith. Lose too much Soul or gain too much Fear and the child is in terrible trouble, and quite possibly lost to Closetland itself.

The mechanics of *Little Fears* are very simple, using a few d6. The basic Quiz means rolling under the appropriate stat on one die. Opposed rolls are called Tests, and to succeed you roll above an opponent's stat rather than your own. If a Quality has any bearing on the situation, than an extra die is also rolled, with the best score being kept if the Quality is positive, the worst if it is negative. Should the die rolls result in the same scores, they are re-rolled until there is a definite result. Adults have the same range of stats scores, but always roll two dice and take the best. The rules on combat are an extension of the Quizzes and Tests, and outside of simple childhood games, are very deadly.

Almost like a junior version of *Call of Cthulhu*, checks against each child's Fear will come often. These are rolled as a Quiz against the Spirit stat and failures usually lead to a roll on the "Don't Be Such A Chicken" table. Since this is one of the few tables in the game, it should have been printed at the book's end for easy reference. The table is really only a guideline, and often a Quality (such as Screamer) or the circumstances will dictate the child's response.

A child may have access to what is known as "Hand-Me-Downs," items of a mystical nature that might aid them in their overcoming the fears and monsters of the Demagogue. As almost unseen allies, they might have the Divine Host, but they cannot actually confront a monster from Closetland. The Hand-Me-Downs do feel out of place, because *Little Fears* is game in which children overcome their fears through their own efforts, even if that effort is through faith and the protection that it might manifest, such as your favorite blanket being able to smother or entangle a monster, or a ritual that gives you protection.

Little Fears contains one clear piece of advice among many -- know your players and know their limits as well as your own. The themes of this game are strong and there is no reason to upset your players through this game. If you are to include some of the stronger taboos in a game, it is better to keep them off screen, rather than forcing them brutally upon your players. Of course *Little Fears* need not be played in this "True Horror" style. Instead it offers "Faery Tales" (Brothers Grimm) and "Scary Stories" (children versus traditional monsters) as credible alternatives, but its genius works best in the True Horror style. This is certainly the style for the three scenario outlines and one expanded outline that *Little Fears* includes.

Despite the cleverness of *Little Fears* and the maturity of its writing, there remains just one question: Are child abuse and pedophilia suitable subjects for a game? In attempting an answer, I find myself in two minds. My primary -- and gut -- reaction, as both a normal adult and a parent of an eight-year-old daughter, is to say, quite bluntly, no. Yet from an artistic standpoint, Jason Blair cannot be condemned entirely out of hand. *Little Fears* does not treat these subjects lightly and I cannot help but applaud his careful handling and approach. There still remains in the game the potential for it be both misunderstood and controversial. Further I suspect that it may become the type of game that is owned for the kudos of owning it, rather than to be played.

The taboos aside, *Little Fears* still remains a disturbing game that asks us to examine something fundamental to every one of us -- our childhood. It contains elegant mechanics and some clever ideas. For these alone, it is worth looking at, but because it asks both player and GM to examine the uncomfortable, potential buyers really need to ask themselves whether they are prepared to deal with these themes as part of a game.

--*Matthew Pook*

Pyramid Review

Weep: Six Scenarios of Woe and Ruin (for Unknown Armies)

Published by [Atlas Games](#)

Written Rick Neal, James Palmer, Greg Stolze, John Tynes, and Chad Underkoffler

176 pages (perfect bound, softcover), \$22.95

Atlas Games has finally released its long-delayed supplement for *Unknown Armies*, *Weep*, which is a collection of six scenarios. *Weep* compares favorably with *Unknown Armies'* previous book of scenarios, *One Shots*, but unlike the adventures in *One Shots*, those found in this collection are probably best suited for ongoing campaigns.

Note that spoilers about the specific scenarios follow, so read on at your own risk.

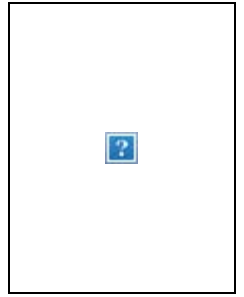
The book opens with a so-so short story by Greg Stolze that is filled with a bit too much gamespeak and has no real resolution. The first scenario in *Weep* is written by the inimitable John Tynes, but it is less of a complete scenario and more of a module that could be plugged into a lull in an ongoing adventure. I was a little disappointed that they included this piece because it had been previously published in Game Trade magazine (Vol. 1 #4), which is a fairly obscure publication, I suppose, so I guess I can't fault them too much for including it.

Next up is Rick Neal's scenario about a gathering of high-powered Avatars of The Merchant (adepts who can trade for anything, including years off your life, your sight, etc., and who can generally get their hands on anything you can possibly imagine -- for a price). The scenario seems like it would probably be best suited for an ongoing campaign, and would be the perfect way to have the PCs acquire something that they have been seeking for some time. It includes a number of very interesting NPCs (one or two of which might be a little over the top for some *Unknown Armies* campaigns) that could be used in almost any campaign, even if the scenario itself isn't used whole cloth.

The third scenario is "Drink to That," written by Greg Stolze, and is a short quasi-sequel to "Bill in Three Parts," the introductory adventure included in the main *UA* book. Like Tynes' scenario above, this scenario is short, punchy, and filled with high weirdness, rather than gritty street-level action. It doesn't include any game mechanics, but it doesn't really require any. It looks like it would also be fun to slip this into an ongoing campaign in piece parts, though the ending seems to fall apart just a tad.

The fourth scenario, and longest by far in the book, is "The Green Glass Grail" by Chad Underkoffler. This is a convoluted scenario with lots of moving parts, and I'd recommend it only to an experienced GM who's very familiar with the material as presented. It includes gobs of NPCs, each pursuing their own interests. The scenario includes a handy checklist/worksheet that would be a good way to organize the adventure, due to the sheer number of options for the GM. If this scenario has a failing, it's that it might be **too** ambitious, providing almost too many options. Some GMs may prefer this approach, while others might feel overwhelmed. In any case, it's a fun scenario with lots of "crunchy bits" (new rituals, artifacts and NPCs) and is one of the best in the book.

The next scenario is another short one by Greg Stolze, and concerns a bigfoot sighting in a small town. The scenario is interesting because it introduces a new campaign narrative structure -- Mystery Hunting -- that could be used for anything from *Scooby Doo* to the *X-Files*. It also presents the relationships among all the NPCs used in the scenario in an interesting (and eminently stealable) tabular fashion. I should note that there are no actual supernatural occurrences in the scenario, other than what the PCs may bring with them, which may be either a welcome change or a disappointment for the PCs.



The final scenario, "Garden Full of Weeds," by James Palmer, is the real gem of the book. The adventure concerns an urban slum that is experiencing an extremely high level of infant mortality and other weirdness. As the PCs investigate, they will discover layer after layer of horror and villainy. There are some truly memorable NPCs and scenes in the scenario, and it will take a *very* thorough team of investigators to uncover what's causing all the problems. As with almost all of James Palmer's work, this adventure is extremely well written and engaging and is almost worth the price of the book all by itself.

The book has very few to no typos, and is well written and organized. Like the last few *Unknown Armies* books, the interior font is fairly large, and I wonder if Atlas couldn't have printed this book with slightly smaller font and commensurately lower page count, but the layout of the book isn't bad. Cover and interior art are bland and inoffensive, but are nothing to write home about. Weep also includes a number of weird photographs taken by John Tynes, as is the norm for the *Unknown Armies* series. Many of the photos in Weep are of a freakish, evil-looking doll that was enjoyably disturbing.

If you are looking for additional material for your ongoing *Unknown Armies* campaign, Weep is a good buy, as there are some real gems here. If you're a casual reader, or someone looking for a *Unknown Armies* scenario to run at a convention or as a one-shot for new players, you'd probably want to pick up *One Shots* instead.

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Note: In the interest of full disclosure, I should mention that I helped playtest an early version of Chad Underkoffler's scenario that looked almost nothing like the published version.

--Andrew Byers

Vast, Cool, and Alternate: Four More Wars of the Worlds

"At any rate, whether we expect another invasion or not, our views of the human future must be greatly modified by these events. We have learned now that we cannot regard this planet as being fenced in and a secure abiding place for Man; we can never anticipate the unseen good or evil that may come upon us suddenly out of space."

-- H.G. Wells, *The War of the Worlds*

With *The War of the Worlds*, H.G. Wells did more than simply create for all time the paradigmatic "alien invasion" story. He was also commenting on history, and on certain assumptions made by his fellow Europeans about their inevitable place on top of it. Any balance of power can come unbalanced, any conquerors can find themselves conquered, any empire can vanish overnight -- and all it takes is a spark. Admittedly, in the case of Wells' British Empire, it took a spark on the surface of Mars -- but historical doom never comes from where you're looking. In these four alternates, historical doom comes in the shape of Wells' Martians, complete with advanced weapons and infantile immune systems -- and leaves the Earth changed.

"Astounded by the unexpected assault of unknown people, whom they considered demons rather than men, they gave no thought to defending themselves."

-- Nicolaus Federmann, *History of the Indians*

Bartholomaeus Welser never regretted spending the extra money on astrologers. As head of Augsburg's largest banking house (and Germany's second largest), he had the money, and he needed the news that only the stars and planets could give him. So by 1538, when the Martians landed in England, his experts had told him years before that the mysterious lights spelled the greatest disaster Europe had ever seen. Bartholomaeus and the family fortune were on the first ships out of Europe, on their way to the Welsers' Venezuela colony. Welser (and his own personal conquistador, Federmann) came to a modus vivendi with Cortez in Mexico and Pizarro in Peru; the three kept order in New Spain as the refugee armada swarmed in, bearing news of Europe's destruction, the unstoppable Black Smoke, and the burning of Paris, Seville, and Rome. Even after the Martians died, Europe fell to the heathen Turk; if Christendom would survive, it must conquer this lush, alien New World.

This *GURPS Swashbucklers-Aztecs* crossover can play as "straight" alternate history from here on in; there's plenty for a party of PC conquistadors to do maintaining order, exploring the rivers and jungles, and building a permanent civilization. GMs may want to play up the metaphor inherent in the setting, with the conquistadors' metal armor, bizarre vehicles, and killing black smoke neatly paralleling the Martians' in Europe. (The European tendency to fever in the jungles makes another interesting parallel.) The setting leaves plenty of room for magic, as Renaissance occultism (*Cabal* style) intersects with Aztec death-magics and Amazon shamanism, in a kind of **Voodoo: The Shadow War: 1550** milieu. Finally, there's always the possibility that a bold party of brigands might sail back to a prostrated Europe and steal one of the Martians' alchemical Walking War Machines

"It is impossible to form a conjecture of the amount of the enemy's loss in this action; but, from all reports, it is very considerable The number of dead on the field is very large Such an advantage could not have been acquired without material loss on our side; but it certainly has not been of a magnitude to distress the army, or to cripple its operations."

-- Arthur Wellesley, the Duke of Wellington, Jul 24, 1812

There are those who say that the Battle of Waterloo was won on the red sands of Mars. Arthur Wellesley, the Duke of Wellington, is not one of them. Certainly the Martian invasion, coming as it did in 1812 at the height of the Napoleonic Wars, scorched the heart out of Napoleon's Empire, and left it a shattered ruin. But when Napoleon's mad energy and brilliance rallied the prostrate army of France for one last strike at the hated foe, Wellington had to stop him alone -- Austria, Prussia, and Russia had all fallen beneath the Martian onslaught. After Waterloo, Wellington stayed on, rebuilding Europe with his own "thin red line" all that stood between the survivors and complete desolation. Even after

20 years as Prime Minister, the Iron Duke still labors to keep Europe peaceful, and orderly, and recovering -- and if that means the British Army has to put down every riot from Barcelona to Budapest, so be it. Give 'em a whiff of Black Smoke and send in the Walkers, that's the cure for the Fever of 1848.

This dystopian *GURPS Steampunk* setting reverses Wells geopolitically: we have met the Martians and they are us. Rather than serving as the nemesis to British pride, the Martian invasion made Britain master of the Continent by default, and left Faraday, Brunel and the other mad steampunk geniuses of the Industrial Revolution the means to perpetuate the Empire. PCs can be elite Walking Foot units of Wellington's army, or desperate Chartist (or European) rebels against London's overwhelming might. GMs with an even larger scope in mind might see Wellington and Polk butt heads over the Oregon Question, and launch an ironclad invasion of America with a British amphibious landing just outside Grover's Mill, New Jersey . . .

"I went at once to the White House. Mr. Seward and Mr. Chase, with Mr. Stanton, were already there, had read the telegram, and were discussing the intelligence in much alarm. Each inquired what had been, and what could be done, to meet and check this formidable monster, which in a single brief visit had made such devastation, and would, herself uninjured, repeat her destructive visit with still greater havoc, probably, while we were in council."

-- Gideon Welles, Secretary of the Navy (1861-1869)

In 1862, the Martians landed at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. And at Hampton Roads, Virginia. And Paducah, Kentucky. All along the border between the warring states, the terrible tripods of the angry red planet rained down death upon blue and gray alike. After two disastrous months, however, some unknown miasma of Earth's atmosphere killed the invaders, leaving the battlefields littered with abandoned War Machines, Cylinder-Ships, and Heat-Ray Cannon. By summer of 1863, it seems apparent that the War Between the States will resume the instant that one side feels it can strike and win a decisive blow. U.S. Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles feverishly drives his team of geniuses -- Dahlgren, Eads, and Ericsson -- to reverse-engineer the Martian technology before Josiah Gorgas and his Confederate brain trust can do the same. America -- and perhaps the world -- belongs to the side who masters the Martian way fastest with the mostest.

This setting begins as a standard *GURPS Steampunk-Old West-Mecha* game of Martian tripod combat and weird science. PCs can be elite units of either side, working to steal prototypes, invent new terrors, and foil raiders. Scientific and military agents of the great European Powers, too, will be sniffing around both the Union and Confederate depots, stirring up trouble to prevent a reunited America armed with Martian technology -- ideal opponents (or protagonists) of an *Espionage* game. For another development, mix in some *Deadlands* -- perhaps it wasn't the common cold, but the first emergence of the Reckoners, that killed the Martians. And can Martians become Harrowed, and rise again?

"We need not fail."

-- Sumner Welles, Undersecretary of State (1937-1943)

What Orson Welles might have broadcast on Halloween night, 1938, no one will ever know, because he died when the Martians destroyed New York City. Virtually the entire government died when they destroyed Washington; in all the confusion of the invasion, it took several weeks for Undersecretary of State Sumner Welles to get sworn in as the President of the devastated United States. On top of the Depression, the massive destruction of nearly every American city east of the Mississippi left America broken and impotent in the face of Nazi aggression. Only Welles' foresight kept even a trickle of research funding going, as Goddard and Fermi and Tesla worked to discover the principles behind the invaders' amazing weaponry. When the Nazis landed "to assist the white race of America" in 1945, the Grover's Mill Project had barely completed a few prototypes -- one of which, however, was the space-cylinder. Cylinder commander Robert Heinlein, USN, evacuated President Welles and the core of the Project in that cylinder barely hours ahead of the Luftwaffe bombers -- on a desperate mission to establish an American refuge in the technological storehouses of Mars! Germ warfare finished off the Martians' dying civilization, and the Project settled in for research -- and revenge.

This is a *GURPS Atomic Horror-Alternate Earths* campaign frame pitting a tiny band of American space-heroes against a Nazi-occupied Earth. It can begin with the PCs as cylinder-pilots, secretly buzzing German aerodromes, monitoring their nuclear tests, abducting their scientists, and (perhaps) bringing some red-blooded American women

to Mars to help perpetuate the colony there. From there, the campaign can progress to linkups with the American Resistance, feature guerrilla space-raids pitting the rag-tag American rebels against the might of the Nazi Empire's burgeoning space fleet, and end with a final showdown as America launches a new War of the Worlds to liberate Earth, and to open space to all mankind!

Lifestyles Of The Fictional and Famous

All right, Pyramidkateers, just as a warning: I'm currently very sick, it's currently late, and I haven't been able to sleep it off because of a sore throat. So if this column is less coherent than normal, don't blame me; blame the tiny beings attacking my cells.

Anyway, I was at DragonCon this past weekend, and had a very good time. I played in my second-ever live action game, heard a live performance of Terry Pratchett's "Guards! Guards!", overloaded on DVDs at the "three for \$25" booth, walked about seventy-seven jillion miles, and bought my first Renaissance clothing (thus beginning my journey down the dark path . . . verily).

And I got to meet a bunch of celebrities.

Some were cool, some were neat, some were nice, some were none of these things.

I imagine we all have people we would love to meet. In the information age, it's more possible than ever to glean tantalizing bits about those we admire and respect (with some notable reclusive exceptions). And, at least in my experience, most of the times we *do* meet these kind of folks, it's not what we expect.

Because, at the core, people are people. Some have more quirks than others, some are physically different from what we had thought ("You're shorter in person!"), and some people we weren't expecting to like -- or didn't even know! -- you become a fan of *because* you met them. (I can't count the number of times I've met creative-types whose work I wasn't familiar with, and because I met them I became hooked.)

Of course, there's ripe potential here for roleplaying.

Because, with few exceptions, every campaign setting has celebrities. These can be local celebrities, like the noble lords of old, current local politicians, or famous people who live in the area. (I understand it's relatively common to spot famous folks in New York or Los Angeles.) Or they can be nationally (or greater!) people, either whom the characters have gone to see, or have come to see the characters.

Here are a few examples, taken from both real life and my gaming.

- Don't take it for granted that you'll meet someone, just because you're in close proximity. I went to Florida State University for five years (yes, the five-year plan . . . I changed majors on year four), yet ran into National Champion football coach Bobby Bowden exactly once: when my friend and I were cutting across a sports field to get to one of the (few) parking lots on campus. We passed him as he was walking the other way. I turned to my friend and said, "Wasn't that?" She said, "I think it was . . ." Unfortunately, our options for verification consisted of sprinting after and/or tackling him, which didn't seem like the best idea.

To extend this to gaming, consider that even if, say, the heroes *are* members of the Space Ace Flying Squadron, this doesn't necessarily mean they'll have met the famous Mauve Baron. Or if the heroes are members of the world-saving superheroic set, they may still suffer from hero worship when they meet Sobrehumano.

- I have met McGruff the Crime Dog . . . which might have had more impact if I wasn't a high school senior at the time. (I have a non-gaming-related essay about this experience I might post on my website, if there's demand.) Suffice it to say I was underwhelmed. But it was primarily ceremonial. In the gaming world, such gestures might manifest in receiving (many) keys to the city, a ritualistic "marriage to the queen of the fair," or other more or less meaningless meetings. These can be as meaningful or meaningless as the characters (and players) want.
- In the *Aberrant* campaign I ran, I had an unparalleled opportunity to play with the idea of celebrities, both fictional (since the game world revolves around wildly famous super-powered beings) and real (since the game takes place in 2008). I let the players meet all the major fictional players in order to more fully immerse them into the plots of that universe. And then, to help emphasize the celebrity nature of the PCs, I had several

celebrities want to meet the *heroes*. In particular I had the heroes meet the vice-president (who wanted to ask a character's help in the upcoming election), and a real-world celebrity who supports the NRA (who wanted to ask a gun-using hero's help to promote that organization). In most of these circumstances I tried to play up *both* the celebrity and human natures of these encounters; how do you react when you run into a childhood idol in the bathroom?

Of course, for most of these encounters to work you need to emphasize the worldview of celebrities to the players ahead of time. Getting to meet Duke Bobbins isn't going to have any impact if they've never heard of him. But if they've heard continual rumors that he's a blood-thirsty tyrant, then an encounter with him where he's (seemingly) warm and open will be more off-putting. Obviously if you're using real-world celebrities in your fictional games you don't need to do as much foreshadowing, nor do you need to do much if the character is an established part of the game universe. (You don't need to explain Batman or Emperor Alexius Hawkwood in a *DC Universe* or *Fading Suns* game . . . though you *would* need to explain Batman in a *Fading Suns* game or vice-versa.)

In all, getting to meet people you ordinarily wouldn't is always a thrill -- in both the real and fictional worlds. Playing up that excitement is a great way to put butterflies in both players' and characters' stomachs.

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My current schedule says I'm going to try tackling the slushpile -- and my email inbox -- this weekend. If you've been waiting patiently for me to get back to you, I appreciate it; hopefully you'll hear from me soon.

And if you've been waiting, but not patiently, I don't blame you at all.

If you have immediate questions, I'll try to be in the chat rooms this weekend.

(As an aside, if this illness continues, this schedule may go to heck. I'll try to post updates in the *Pyramid* newsgroups.)

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John Kovalic has sworn that he will return next week. Let's hope so . . . we miss him. Come home, John! Hugs! Hugs!

(And I still want to meet John one of these days . . . ah, the joys and perils of telecommuting.)

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Now if you'll excuse me, I'm going to pass out. (Hopefully I'll be able to sleep with this dang sore throat. Grf.)

--*Steven Marsh*

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Last week's answer: In Nomine Superiors 2, p. 47. (The section on Haagenti. Mmm . . . Haagenti.)

(*Three stars*) "Dirt fouls your nostrils and mouth as you reach the inevitable conclusion: You yourself, once a holy paladin, have become one of the hateful undead! But you have no idea who you are or how you got here . . ."

Armor Damage in GURPS

by Peter V. Dell'Orto

GURPS fans have been blessed by a system that allows you to break shields, shatter weapons, cripple limbs, but even after you reduce your foe's weapons and shield to flinders and his body to -10xHT his armor is still fine.

Until now. The following rules are an extension of the rules for Armor Enchantment in *GURPS Magic* on p. M46. These rules expand upon those rules, and include further optional rules you can add on to bring this system to the level of grittiness you need for a campaign. This system does require some bookkeeping by GMs and players alike, but not really that much more than the Damage to Shields rules (p. B120) require. These rules add some extra realism to combat as well; armor wears out, requiring repairs and eventual replacement.

Armor Damage

Armor can only withstand a limited amount of destruction -- referred to as Maximum Penetrations -- before it is no longer capable of protection. Armor can take $(DR+1)*5$ penetrations before becoming useless as protection. For example, Reinforced Heavy Leather (DR 3) can take $(3+1)*5=20$ penetrations before becoming useless. For armor with split DR, such as chainmail, use the highest DR to calculate the Maximum Penetrations. A penetration is defined as any hit that does damage greater than DR. Blows that do less than or equal to DR do not count as penetrations. Armor divisors do lower the amount of damage needed to cause a penetration, but do not cause additional penetration to the armor. Penetrations are tracked on a per- location basis if using the Hit Location chart; if you use Basic Combat, calculate penetrations based on the torso and count all penetrations as being against the torso armor.

Note that some ultra-tech weapons (Flamers, sonic weapons, etc.) already do armor damage -- the effects should be combined if these rules are used as well. Magic can damage armor as well. As a rule, spells which cause damage reduced normally by armor DR (such as Fireball, Ice Dagger) will inflict penetrations like any other attack, while spells which bypass armor's protection (Dehydrate, Deathtouch) will inflict no penetrations. Some magic can be used to directly attack armor. For example, Shape Metal or Reshape can be used to shape armor completely off a location. Ruin inflicts PD and DR loss per p. M59, which will reduce the Maximum Penetrations by 5 per minute. Shatter and Disintegrate will succeed if the damage inflicted is greater than the Maximum Penetrations of the armor, and destroy that location's armor completely. If they fail, no damage is inflicted. The Weaken spell will inflict 1d6 penetrations per casting. And so on -- a GM's judgment is needed to cover the myriad of magic attacks that can damage armor.

As per *GURPS Magic*, *Fortify* and *Deflect* wear out as well and a little more rapidly. Regardless of any non- magical armor repair, magical armor will become non-magical after 5 times the *base DR* penetrations (0 base DR would get 5 penetrations). Chainmail would survive 15 penetrations before becoming non-magical, a leather jacket only 5. Both armors would need 5 more penetrations (At base DR, not DR + Fortify, which is gone when the spell is broken) before becoming useless as armor. While base DR is used to calculate the number of penetrations the enchantment can sustain, *actual DR* (including Fortify) is used to determine *if* armor has been penetrated. Fortify +5 Heavy Plate (DR 12) may take only 35 penetrations before becoming non- magical, and 40 penetrations before being ruined as armor, but it would take 35 attacks each doing at least 13 damage followed by 5 doing at least 8 each to do this! If the armor is destroyed as armor *before* an enchantment wears off (say, Light Leather with Deflect +5 cast on it), the enchantment is considered destroyed when the armor is destroyed. Magic such as the *Repair* spell will repair the enchantments on a damage suit of armor as well as fixing the mundane damages.

When calculating penetrations, only *that individual layer of armor counts*. If you are wearing a steel breastplate (DR 5) over Fortify +1 light leather (DR 2), you must take 8 points of damage for the light leather to be penetrated, but only 6 damage for the breastplate to be penetrated. *Exception*: Chainmail and its accompanying Cloth Armor should be treated as one layer for both simplicity and to prevent chainmail from rapidly losing the benefit of its cloth padding.

At no point in this process is PD or DR reduced (but see the various Optional Rules, below). *Sealed* armor is

considered unsealed after it takes 10% of its Maximum Penetrations. Most high-tech sealed armor will have limited self-sealing capabilities; a single penetration is not enough to cause the armor to become unsealed. Note that this is cumulative with the unsealing effects of Flamers.

And yes, if an attack does Blow Through, excess damage is applied to the back of the armor piece. Truly destructive attacks can easily cause double penetrations. This is called an "exit wound."

Armor Repair

Damaged armor can be repaired. This requires appropriate skill (12+ in Armoury, or Leatherworking for leather armor) and materials (ranging from a needle, thread, and cloth patches to a full forge or machine shop). The cost to repair is 5% of the original cost plus the penetrations suffered vs. Maximum Penetrations, expressed as a percentage. After taking more than half of its possible penetrations, the cost is 20% of the original cost plus the percentage taken -- the armor is very badly damaged and needs a full rebuild. Cost assumes you are paying a professional to do the work -- if you do it yourself, cost of repair is halved (the cost is for materials expended). Note that after a certain point, armor can become so damage replacement is cheaper than repair. A *Repair* spell (p. M60) can be cast as well -- any armor having taken more than half of its Maximum Penetrations should be considered to have missing parts and give a penalty to skill. A penalty to cast the spell is a good justification for a hireling wizard to charge extra, if a GM so chooses. After all, the caster is taking an extra risk of failure or critical failure because of the damage taken.

Ultra Tech repair methods can also affect the cost of armor repair, at the GMs option. If armor is made from Living Metal (p. UT18) or Bioplas (p. UT17) it will slowly repair itself -- Living Metal at 1 penetration/hour and Bioplas at 1 penetration/6 hours. If the materials used in the armor are rare or the technology to repair it is expensive, the cost may increase. This applies to low tech and fantasy armor as well -- perhaps even higher skills (15+ or even 20+) are need to repair armors made from rare or magical materials. Cost will escalate as well -- but note that the base system already scales to make more expensive armor more expensive to fix. Armor that has been decorated (see optional rules, below), or armor of higher or lower quality, uses its increased (or for Cheap, reduced) cost to determine cost of repairs.

Example of armor repair: A heavy plate corselet costs \$2300. It can suffer 40 penetrations and has taken 13. 13 is 32.5% of 40. The cost to repair the armor is $\$115 + \$747.50 = \$862.50$. Plate is durable, but expensive! Had that same suit taken 21 penetrations, the cost would have been $\$460 + \$1207.50 = \$1667.50$. Once the armor has taken more than 32 penetrations, it is actually cheaper to buy a new suit and scrap the old one for metal value (say, 5-10% of original cost). Of course, to get 32 penetration on this corselet requires 32 attacks doing 8 points of damage or more.

Wear, Tear, and Decoration

General wear and tear can damage armor. Armor that is not properly maintained (one hour a week by a skilled craftsman -- see Armor Repair, above) will suffer damage -- effectively, suffering the equivalent of penetrations. Armor that is being actively worn, or is just neglected, will suffer the equivalent of 1 penetration every two months unless it is being actively maintained. This represents accumulated wear on straps, minor breaks and tears, nicks, cuts, and scrapes of all kinds that eventually wear down the armor and require repairs. Penetrations suffered in this manner are treated normally for purposes of enchantment, repair, and optional rules such as DR reduction (see below).

GMs wishing to avoid the bookkeeping of penetrations but who wish to keep track of armor damage can use the wear and tear rule to keep PCs caring for their armor. After any battle in which a character was injured at least once, the armor can be assessed 1d6 penetrations. Modify this roll by -1 or -2 for a small skirmish or melee or by +1 (large battle) to +3 (desperate, huge battle). Penetrations can be assessed on a per-suit or per-location basis. After a Mass Combat, Armor Damage can be assessed normally (after determining the results on the Damage Table) or this simplified system can be used: apply any penalties to survival as a plus to the number of penetrations suffered.

Armor Decoration: Armor may be finely decorated, with precious metals, jewels, or just exceptionally fine construction. Well-decorated armor will cost more to purchase and to repair. Armor decoration is available in *fine* quality (4x cost) and *Very Fine* (20x cost, or more). These modifiers will multiply with those of armor quality. At a

GM's option, *fine* decorations may give a +1 to reaction rolls and *very fine* decorations a +2. Naturally, decorated armor uses its *decorated* cost to determine cost of repairs . . .

Optional Rules

The following are optional rules that can be added onto the above system. Some of that add even more bookkeeping, and can change the dynamics of combat. All of them have been playtested, but a GM should exercise some caution before using them -- especially the PD reduction rules.

- *Average Split DR*: For armor types with different levels of protections against different attack types, average the DR and round down. For example, Chainmail with Cloth padding provides DR 4 against cutting or crushing attacks and DR 2 against impaling attacks $4 (\text{cut}) + 4 (\text{crush}) + 2 (\text{imp})/3 = 3.33$ rounded down to 3. Chainmail can therefore take $(3+1)*5=20$ penetrations. This tends to reduce the amount of damage it takes to destroy most "split DR" armors. GMs seeking more variation can multiply by the unrounded number, only rounding off the final number of penetrations -- for example, Chainmail could absorb up to $3.33 * 5 = 16.65$ or 17 penetrations.
- *Fragile Armor*: While the armor damage systems works for most armor types, GMs may decide that certain armor types are especially fragile -- for example, Wood Slat or Cane Armor, or exotic types such as Antillian Glass Armor (see *GURPS Conan* p. 20). Armor determined to be so vulnerable will suffer double or triple penetrations from some or all attack types -- or, in the case of the glass armor, destroyed after a single penetration. Alternately, some armors can be damage normally but harder or easier to repair; simply double or half the cost to repair, respectively. Mail, for example, is fairly easy to repair -- replacing lost links is easier than replacing damaged scales or hammering gashes out of plate -- and can easily justify half repair cost. Some armors, such as the Straw Overcoat, can probably be repaired for free with access to appropriate materials.
- *Multiple Penetrations*: Under the base system, all weapons inflict penetrations equally well. GMs may feel that attacks from ultra-tech blasters or vicious axe swings should inflict more penetrations than a laser beam or arrow point.

Treat every full multiple of the DR that penetrates armor as an additional penetration. Damage Type multipliers other than Impaling are counted before determining total penetrations. For example, a suit of Reinforced Heavy Leather (DR 3) hit for 7 base cut (7-3 for DR, +50% for cut = 6) would suffer two penetrations. Had the blow only done 6 base cut (total damage 5) only one penetration would be inflicted. This allows large cutting or crushing attacks to tear large rents in armor, while focused impaling attacks still stave only small holes.

Another option is to rule that attacks that do more than 6d of damage do one penetration per 6d of base damage, if any penetrations are made. For example, a TL 9 Heavy Blaster (6dx3 damage) does 3 penetrations per hit, so long as 1 hit is done past DR. A GM can raise or lower the bar for certain weapons (say, Blasters or Flamers), all weapons (perhaps 3d?), or require that at least 1 hit get past DR for each penetration.

A further option is to make every 10 points of damage that exceeds DR count as a penetration, allowing for those high-damage attacks to fry armor as fast as it fries the wearer. Not that this option effectively makes all armor Ablative (*GURPS Vehicles* p.22).

- *Cap Maximum Penetrations*: Most TL 9+ armor have enough DR to make its destruction unlikely. A DR 80 Cybersuit will take 405 penetrations before becoming useless as armor. At that point, the wearer has taken at least 405 points of damage, making this (probably) irrelevant. A simple fix is to cap Maximum Penetrations -- any DR above 10 or 15 (for example) will not contribute to calculating Maximum Penetrations. This will lower the amount of penetrations needed to destroy a given piece of armor without making it any more vulnerable to penetration in the first place. The Maximum Penetrations Cap rule is recommended as the default for campaigns featuring TL6+ armor.
- *Blunt Penetrations*: Under the basic rules, blunt weapons can inflict penetrations -- minor tears, small punctures from spikes or flanges, deformation of the armor that does structural damage. However, some GMs may find this simplistic -- not all crushing attacks that injure the wearer will damage the armor -- or find the idea of a non-penetrating "penetration" unrealistic. Under this optional rule, non-bullet crushing attacks do not inflict penetrations. Instead, a penetration is inflicted for every "6" rolled on a crushing attack that penetrates DR. For

example, DR 7 plate is hit for 3d of damage from a maul, with rolls of 6, 6, and 2. The wearer takes 7 points of damage, and the armor takes (1+1+0) 2 penetrations. This represents severe deformation of the armor that both does structural damage and requires repairs to keep the armor functional.

- *DR Is Reduced By Damage:* After a given piece of armor has suffered 10 penetrations, its DR is reduced by 1. Further penetrations do not reduce it any further. There is no minimum DR, since DR 1 armor will be destroyed after 10 penetrations, making this a non- issue.

Another option is to reduce DR by -1 for every 10 penetrations taken. Minimum DR is 1, although most armor will be destroyed before this point is reached.

A GM can also choose to base it as a flat percentage so DR declines as penetrations accumulate. Note that percentage systems mean that heavy armor rapidly loses DR while light armor stay fully functional until destroyed.

Ablative Armor, which loses 1 DR for every 10 hits that penetrates the armor, should suffer from *both* rules if a DR reducing optional rule is used, making it very vulnerable to repeated penetrations. Most Ablative Armor will reach 0 DR before it reaches its Maximum Penetrations, though, so the extra bookkeeping might not be worth it.

Armor that has had its DR reduced by damage is treated as "Cheap" (*Editor's note: See "Chainmail . . . Why Bother?", coming next week*) for purposes of sale value (but *not* for weight or repair cost) by the GM. This can lead to PCs "dumpster diving" in the hopes of purchasing high-quality armor on the cheap, or unscrupulous merchants selling cheap armor as good armor.

- *PD Is Reduced By Damage:* After a given piece of armor has suffered 10 penetrations, its PD is reduced by 1. Minimum PD is 0 -- armor can easily become unable to deflect blows effectively while still providing some DR. Torn and crumpled and holed armor can catch weapons that pristine armor would let glance off. Further penetrations do not reduce it any further. Armor that has had its PD reduced by damage is treated as "Cheap" (see above).

Percentage based PD reduction is also possible. Instead of reducing PD after a flat number of penetrations, PD is -1 for every 20% of Maximum Penetrations sustained. There is no minimum PD -- After 20% damage, even the heaviest armor can lose all PD while retaining some DR. On the downside, the lightest armors (light leather and cloth) lose all of their PD after two penetrations.

If DR reduction is also being used, PD can be reduced proportionally to DR per *GURPS Vehicles*, p. VE24.

- *Penetrations Cause Permanent Damage:* Once armor has been damaged past a certain point it is often a write-off. The rules already reflect this, but in some circumstances armor may be repaired anyway. Post-apocalypse survivors, stranded time travelers, adventures with unique and irreplaceable armor, may not have the option of buying new armor to replace old. Once armor has taken 80% or more of its Maximum Penetrations and been repaired, it loses 10% of its Maximum Penetrations. Heavy Plate (40 penetrations) would drop to 36 Maximum Penetrations after taking 32 or more penetrations and being repaired. This is applied only *after* repairs -- it would still take 40 penetrations to utterly ruin the plate in the example, but only 36 the *next* time. If the PD and or DR is reduced by damage due to other optional rules, use the original penetrations number to determine the actual PD. Note that accumulated damage can easily mean that the PD and/or DR of the armor is lowered permanently. This becomes a slippery slope -- the armor will be hit and penetrated more often, and less and less penetrations will be needed to cause further reductions.

Note that the *Repair* spell will eliminate such permanent damage; some high tech armors (especially those made of super- science materials like Living Metal) would be unlikely to suffer permanent damage.

- *Critical Hits and Penetrations:* GMs may wish to add armor damaging effects to the Critical Hit table -- or simply add such effects to existing rolls. For example, while Bypass All Armor criticals would inflict no penetrations (or inflict 1d6, representing a natural hit to a weak seam, sundering the armor -- GM's option), Double or Triple Normal Damage criticals could cause double or triple penetrations. Another option is to replace

some Critical Hit Table entries with "Armor damage inflicted -- target's armor takes 1d6 penetrations."

- *Field Repairs:* PCs in a jam may need to fix their own armor, without access to the proper tools for the job. A lot of GM judgment is required on this -- without at least a hammer, never mind a forge and so on, you just are not going to be able to repair your steel breastplate. A good rule of thumb is that a skilled craftsperson (12+ in the appropriate skill - Armoury, or Leatherworking for leather armor) can repair 5% of the original Maximum Penetrations per point the skill roll is made by, to a maximum of 95% repaired. All penalties should be taken into account when determining the margin of success. Inadequate tools can make the difference between being able to do a passable job and doing a good job. GMs judgment is required to determine if a second attempt can be made. In some cases it should be obvious that you can start over (rip out the stitches you put in the Cloth Armor and start over) and when you can't (You've hammered out the rent in the helm as best you could, but deforming it again to try again will hurt more than it helps). The amount of time for repairs can vary -- an armorer can repair Skill/2 penetrations per hour with the proper tools, minimum 1 hour.

* * *

Sources: GURPS Basic, GURPS Magic, GURPS Ultra Tech, GURPS Robots, GURPS Vehicles.

(Special thanks to Shawn A Fisher, Dan Howard, Bob Huss, and Sean Punch for numerous suggestions and to my players for testing these on their PC's armor.)

Messing With the Medium:

Taking Advantage Of The Unique Storytelling Elements Of Gaming

by Darren Watts

One of the dangers of GM-ing a long-term campaign is falling into a storytelling rut. Even if the details of your plots change, it's easy to slip into a pattern of repeating the way the story is told. An excellent way of livening up a game in danger of turning into a flat replay of the same old story structures is to take a step back and look at gaming in general, and your game in particular, as a unique medium for storytelling. Use the conventions and elements of gaming itself to make both you and your players see things in a whole new light.

For example, back in my college days I was running a weekly superhero game for four or five of my friends. I'd been tapped for a plot that week, and was idly thinking that it was time to bring back the team's rival villain group with some new master plot. I was tossing around a couple of story ideas when another friend of mine, Tim, dropped by. He mentioned that he'd done some gaming before and was curious about checking out our group, but wasn't able to commit to a regular weekly game for more than a month or so. A fiendish thought seized me, and I asked Tim if he wanted to help me really mess with my players' minds. Tim was all for it, so we created a character for him.

That week, I introduced Tim to my group as though he was looking to join the campaign full-time. A couple of my players knew him distantly, and he seemed like a nice guy, so they were all for it. Tim got right into character, both in the game as a young mentalist super-in-training and out of game as a friendly newbie. He was unsure of what was going on but game to give it a try. My players adopted Tim quickly- Jeff gave him some dice of his own, Marcy and Dan helped him learn the rules system, he joined us for our post-game pizzas. Tim's character acquitted himself fairly well for three sessions, helping the heroes save the world from one threat or another. Tim himself was truly Emmy-worthy in his performance, and I had to bite my cheeks to keep from laughing when he would apologize to everyone for slowing down a fight scene while he fumbled with his character's powers.

Then, in the fourth session, we dropped the hammer. Just as the villains were staging their assault on the heroes' base, suddenly Tim dropped all pretense and became a savagely effective character, ambushing a couple of players and sabotaging their base. As my players' collective jaws hit the carpet, Tim announced that all along he had been part of the villain group and went off on a rambling monologue about the personal injustices that he was going to revenge himself for, on the world in general and the PCs in particular. Then he laughingly threw the team into a deathtrap and left with his pals, the villains. My players stared at each other for a long minute after he was finished, then, one by one, burst out into hysterical laughter. They couldn't believe how thoroughly they'd been taken. Jeff even stood up, walked over and clapped Tim on the back, shaking his hand. Then he demanded his dice back.

Of course, the heroes eventually escaped the deathtrap and stomped on the villains, taking particular pleasure in taking Tim down. But they never forgot that adventure, always adopting a hushed tone when they talked about "The Betrayal." What made it doubly powerful for them, of course, was the underscoring of Tim's character joining the team by the act of Tim joining the gaming group. Only the unique format of a roleplaying game allows for that connection between the real world and the fictional, strengthening both roles. Tim was such a nice guy, and seemed so inarguably well-meaning, that his character was accepted into the team whole-heartedly. His obvious "innocence" overpowered any sense of concern or mistrust players might feel when faced with a new character and a notoriously tricky GM. Obviously, it takes a pretty special player to pull this off, but with the right group it made a wonderful story that was retold to others for years.

Another storytelling element that is unique to gaming is the sense of certainty a player has about his own character, if nothing else in the game world. After all, she created the character, didn't she? The player is the final authority on who the character is, what she was like before the game, how she feels about what happens around her.

Except when she isn't, of course. In a more recent superhero game, the team was gathered at their regular monthly

meeting when a strange purple ray washed over them, knocking them out. They awoke on a strange planet, where they were informed by the odd amphibian scientist who greeted them that they had been teleported across the galaxy to help his race of kindly frog-people battle a strange alien shadow-menace that was destroying their planet. The frog-people, natch, had no super-heroes of their own, but legends of the famous heroes of Earth had spread even to this backwater of the Milky Way. So the frog-scientist had used his experimental teleporter to bring them here, and he was very sorry about the inconvenience, but would the heroes mind saving his planet, please?

With their egos thus boosted ("Hey! We're famous even on Planet Q!"), the heroes gave a stern lecture to Dr. Frog about the importance of asking permission first, then flew out the window to battle the hideous shadow-menace. Said menace turned out to be pretty tough, though, and a couple of the heroes' powers weren't working quite right. Then, unexpectedly, one of the heroes was blasted out of the sky by a "lucky" shot and died.

Well, what had started as a happy romp among the stars had just been wrenched into something completely different. The players commiserated with the player of the dead PC, and angrily started to wonder just what the heck was going on here. Then the scientist of the group, doing a quick autopsy on the body, discovered that the dead body on the slab wasn't the heroine at all, but a surgically-altered frog-person made up to look like her and using cybernetics to mimic her powers. The scientist's player, Ben, then turned to me as everyone absorbed this bit of information. "I do a scan of myself, too. Am I human?"

Bingo! In fact, the players were not playing the mighty Defenders of Justice, but frog-people soldiers, who had been brainwashed into thinking they were the Defenders. The weird purple effect hadn't been a transporter at all, but a brainscan-recording, made so the individual memories of the heroes could be implanted into volunteers from the army in order that the legendary courage and indomitability of the indeed-famous Defenders could be used as a weapon against the enemy. After digesting that info, and after some wonderful role-playing moments by my long-suffering players, the team decided that even though the brainwashing had now failed, they were going in again anyways. In the name of the heroes they once thought they were, they'd save their beleaguered planet. And they did, and my players loved the opportunity to heroically rise to the occasion.

Many ideas for messing around with the structure of the game for the enjoyment of the players can come from other media- TV, movies, comics or novels. Some of these hoary old plot twists can be given new life when injected into the medium of gaming. For example, with the enthusiastic assistance of most of my players, we did an adventure that was a "Star Trek"-like dream sequence of Alex, the one player who was "in the dark" about the story in advance. As a series of horrible events happened in his own life (his wife was nearly killed, then captured by his main enemy, who he was certain was dead), the players around him subtly began to play their characters with slight "continuity errors." The inveterate pipe-smoker lit a cigarette. The loving family man callously dismissed a potential threat to his own wife and children as "unlikely." A character insisted that Alex was misremembering the events of a story from a few weeks ago, and Alex, puzzled, eventually gave in and agreed that his (correct) memories must be flawed. When the story reached its horrifying climax, we abruptly shifted to Alex's character strapped to a surgical table with electrodes protruding from his shaved head and the master villain leaning into his face and cackling. The look on his face as understanding dawned was absolutely worth all of the effort we had all put into coordinating the story. Alex admitted he'd never had more fun as a player, and couldn't believe the lengths to which we had gone to bamboozle him. Just because your players have seen something a hundred times on the small screen, don't underestimate its power to affect in a game when the players are least expecting it.

A caveat before you try this at home- this sort of manipulation isn't everybody's cup of tea. Try to be sure before running a story where one player is "left out" like this that everyone involved is likely to enjoy themselves. Not everyone will take a story where everybody knows what's going on but them in the spirit of fun with which it's intended, just as not everybody can appreciate a practical joke. And never do something like this in a spirit of anything but fun. That is the point, right?

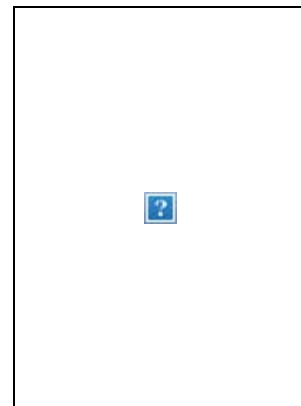
Pyramid Pick

Call of Cthulhu: Great Cthulhu Miniature

Manufactured by [RAFM](#)

Sculpted by Bob Murch

Price: \$49.95



Here we have the chief baddie of the whole Cthulhu Mythos: tentacled head, sagging belly, ragged, decaying wings. He's just as H.P. Lovecraft saw him (the poor devil). In 25mm scale, Cthulhu stands about 5 1/2 inches tall, from the defiled ground beneath his claws to the top of his obscenely buboed head. The top point of his wings is more than an inch higher.

The set comes with detailed (and humorous) instructions, beginning "Congratulations! You have obtained a miniature representation of the mighty Cthulhu himself. Your heirs will probably never know what became of you but they will find this monstrous artifact among your pitiful remains . . ." A very clear line drawing shows how the 13 (!) pieces fit together. Very generous use of epoxy is recommended in the instructions, and they're right . . . this is a *heavy* piece.

In fact, when it's done, it's so big and spiky that you could easily disable an intruder with it, though you'd have to straighten the wings and touch up the paint afterward. And, even if you're not planning to hit someone with it, this piece *requires* a base, but since we assume you bought it with display in mind, this is not a problem. You won't summon this Cthulhu in an evening, or in two. Just preparing the pieces for assembly will take several hours, if you do it right. There are a lot of mold lines to be carefully dealt with (or, if you prefer, covered with gloppy glue; the surface texture of the piece makes that a perfectly good alternative). Mine also had a lot of slaggy flash that had to be removed before the pieces (especially the torso, feet and legs) would fit together at all. And the fit of some of the major pieces (top and bottom head; front and back torso) was pretty casual, with huge gaps no matter how I positioned things. More epoxy! Shovel it in there! Buy another tube!

The head and body feature a number of holes that go all the way *through* the metal. There are different ways to deal with this. You can just leave them there! Or you can cover the bottoms of the holes, on the inside of the piece, with epoxy (More epoxy!), and paint them up as deep blisters or cavities. The long clawed arms just cry out to be posed, but they're too thick to bend safely Ð a drawback of most non-lead alloys. Kitbashers will need a Dremel tool or the like, with a cutting wheel, to make any serious posing changes. Even the claws are too thick to be bent without tools . . . which is a shame, as they look just perfect to wrap around a hapless investigator. However, the fit of the head to the body is loose enough that you can easily tilt the head up and down . . . or, with a bit more work, have it looking to the side.

The detail is good, with all the veins, warts, wens, blisters, and nameless lumps and scabs that you'd expect from old Sucker-Face. It responds well to drybrushing. The casting was not nearly as clean as I'd like; I had to resort to a rotary drill to clean out some of the flash, because my little knife wasn't doing the job. Still and all, it's a great miniature. When you put it together -- assuming that hours of close Cthulhoid contemplation haven't driven you around the bend -- you'll have a museum-quality monstrosity as well as a backup home-defense weapon. Cthulhu would approve.

--Steve Jackson

Like a Spanish Guitar

by Elizabeth McCoy

There is a legend, about a lonely man and an enchanted guitar, and how he plays in clubs and alone through the night

...

The man calls himself Jack. No last name, no middle initials. Just Jack. He's a musician who plays for the dingier dives, though he's been known to turn up at private, ritzy parties, or anywhere in between. He has people who don't like him much, but no enemies; he knows people who will do him a favor now and then, but no one really calls him "friend." He can sing well, but he is best known as a *superb* guitarist. He's best with the sad songs, but can catch everyone in a bawdy ballad if that's requested. Strangely, he refuses to use any instrument other than the one he calls Sarai, an exquisite, 12-stringed guitar that never seems to go out of tune. Further, it never seems to pick up a scratch that can't be polished out, nor stains that don't fade in time.

Naturally, the guitar called Sarai is no natural instrument.

Jack and Sarai may be some campaign color, the target of an assignment, or PCs may simply witness one of the events below personally and be moved to investigate out of greed, curiosity, or sympathy.

If anyone investigates Jack and Sarai, there are certain stories and details that will come up:

- Jack will do anything to keep Sarai from being damaged -- including taking a knife-wound to the chest during a barroom brawl.
- Some people claim that, during some brawls, they've seen the guitar literally *twist* in Jack's hands, protecting him from injury.
- Some of Jack's "enemies" claim that they've seen the guitar bruise when struck with a fist, or bleed when cut by a knife. (They rarely admit to having done so themselves, of course, but that's the most likely way that they'd have been close enough to see this.)
- Jack never goes anywhere without Sarai nearby -- though it's said that he once left the guitar somewhere, and wound up running into a burning building to retrieve it.
- Many people who claim "special sensitivities" hear a woman's voice in counterpoint to Jack's, or accompanying him in song-choruses.
- Anyone who's managed to lay a finger on Sarai remark at the smooth, silken texture of it -- and that it's always a little warmer than they expected. Of course, Jack never lets the guitar get too cold; he claims temperature stresses would damage "her" tone.
- And most recently, there are stories of the woman . . .

While Jack mostly plays existing melodies, he will sometimes be drawn to perform some that he's composed himself. These are always sad or, at best, bittersweet melodies. He's most likely to agree to play "one of them tunes" around midnight. And that's when the weirdest effects happen: the woman's voice harmonizing with the guitar or Jack's own singing; the way the strings look like tears running down the guitar's neck; the scent of perfume in the air . . .

Jack's been playing one of "them tunes" a fair amount, though, one where he sings wordlessly to the guitar -- and when he does so at midnight, some people say that instead of an instrument in his arms, there's a woman singing with him. ("A real looker, too, naked as anything.") But at the end of the performance, he holds a guitar.

And he weeps.

* * *

This setting could be Modern Fantasy, traditional Fantasy (though Sarai might become a lyre or harp), *very* high tech, or *In Nomine*.

Fantasy

Jack has always been a musician, but he used to play at only the best venues. Indeed, he was a Music Mage (see "[The Play's the Thing](#)"), skilled with the Sound College as well as Meta-Spells to allow him to divine the enchantments upon an item. He also knew a little Enchantment of his own.

He took it upon himself to find the truth of some rumors about a powerful mage, working his way into the parties and social circles . . . and he fell in love with the mage's daughter, Sarai.

Needless to say, Things Went Wrong, and the vengeful mage enchanted the "traitorous" Sarai, turning her into a musical instrument . . .

Modern Fantasy

It's always unwise to meddle with magic you don't understand, even for the girlfriend you adore. Jack had always had a "feeling" for the supernatural, as had Sarah (his beloved). So they were excited when they performed the musical spell, thinking that joining their souls with their instruments was *metaphorical* -- but at the final passage, Jack sneezed, and Sarah didn't. Now Sarah's body lies comatose in a hospital, her soul trapped within the guitar . . .

Ultra-Tech

Sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from an evil curse. Saree was a high-tech thief, a cat-burglar of great skill, as well as Jack's musical back-up. Jack was an up-and-coming musician, dreaming of making it big. They were on a circuit (playing more to mining colonies who would do just about anything to get some "real entertainment" than in the fancy venues they hoped to achieve), when Saree absently picked an old spacer's pocket -- and found the coordinates to a Precursor site, right on that very planet.

It was easy to get in -- perhaps too easy, but the door-locks seemed to respond to Jack's perfect pitch as they surely would have not responded to an old spacer's croak. The pair found their way into a store-room, containing all manner of mysterious instruments. One, very like a guitar, caught Saree's eye and she reached out to take it from its niche. The protective nanites, however, were not as easy to disarm as the door locks had been. Jack stole away with his transformed lover and alerted the authorities, hoping that the strange markings inscribed upon Saree's new form (identical to the ones on the instrument she tried to steal) would hold some clue when translated . . .

In Nomine

Jaakan was a demon, an Impudite -- closest Band to humanity -- serving the Prince of Dark Humor, Kobal. His job was to make lovely, witty songs that poked fun at all humanity (or at least Heaven) held dear, infecting human minds with haunting tunes and sick, twisted words. "Poisoning Pigeons in the Park" didn't come *near* to what Jaakan hoped to accomplish.

But somewhere along the way, he fell in love with a human, a fellow musician he'd jammed with a time or two, to preserve his cover. And it was real love, not the usual love of an Impudite for humanity, which is more akin to the love of a cat for songbirds.. And real love is very, very dangerous for a demon.

Kobal found out about it, and he seized the pair. He gave his Servitor demon one chance to live: he would change the mortal woman into a living artifact, a guitar of superb work and tone, and he would let Jaakan go.

Now, humans are not so easy to enchant against their will as demons (and especially Princes) like to claim. Kobal knew this, and he made sure to tell them both that if Sarah were not willing to give up her existence as a woman and most of her sapience, he would simply kill Jaakan. The Prince was sure that the enchantment would fail, that Sarah

would be unable to sacrifice herself for a Hell-spawned demon, and he would be able to destroy Jaakan after letting the Impudite see that his "beloved" had betrayed him. Then, the demon lord planned, he would explain to Sarah how love can make demons redeem, and leave her to go through life with the guilt . . . Yes, that would be Funny.

The enchantment worked, and the woman became a guitar, unaging, always healing, beautiful among instruments as her voice had been beautiful among humans. As if it had been his plan all along (and for a five-second plan, it was pretty damned good), Kobal wrapped a further enchantment around Sarah's new form: the first part of it that if any of the Servitors of Eli, Archangel of Creation (whose ranks are full of artifact experts, and musical experts), ever played the guitar, it would be destroyed. The second part of it . . .

* * *

As can be expected, the curse upon the guitar-woman can be lifted if the player -- Jack -- finds the correct theme, the perfect melody to unlock the woman within. It might be a tune that someone else has lucked onto, it might be one never before played. Jack doesn't know, and he *must* find out, if he's ever to be re-united with the woman he loves.

Pyramid Review

Crouching Wizard, Smashing Hammer (for Rune RPG)

Published by [Atlas Games](#)

Written by Chris Aylott

Illustrated by Scott Reeves & Human Head Studios

32-page saddle stitched soft cover; \$5.00

Let me begin by saying that *Crouching Wizard, Smashing Hammer* is a great title. Not quite as good as Marcus L. Rowland's *Call of Cthulhu* scenario, *On the Trail of the Loathsome Slime*, but inspired nonetheless. It is, in fact, the first release for Atlas Games' Viking roleplaying game, *Rune*. Based upon the computer game of the same name from Human Head Studios and designed by Robin D. Laws, *Rune* put many concepts -- like competitive play, points scoring, and sessions having a winner -- back into roleplaying after years of games telling you to take them out.

Actually, *Crouching Wizard, Smashing Hammer* is the first scenario for *Rune* and comes in rather an odd format, or rather an odd format for an adventure that is not for *Dungeons & Dragons Third Edition*. It makes use of the format pioneered by AEG for their *Adventure Booster* series. Using this format means that Atlas Games have kept the price down and have very much made *Crouching Wizard, Smashing Hammer* into an impulse purchase. In fact, the adventure is double the length of the standard *d20 Adventure Booster* at 32-pages and is still more than reasonably priced at that length.

Crouching Wizard, Smashing Hammer adheres to the big, bold style and layout as seen in the adventure provided in the *Rune* rulebook "The Stolen Rune." It is well organized, and makes use of boxed text marked with icons to indicate when it should be read out to the players . . . or, since this is *Rune*, pillagers. Icons also indicate what the designer has spent points on in designing the adventure's three encounters. *Crouching Wizard, Smashing Hammer* is not heavily illustrated, but the few pieces are of decent quality, having been supplied by Human Head Studios from their concept art for *Halls of Valhalla*, the expansion to the *Rune* computer game. The adventure's maps are drawn by Scott Reeves in an intentionally rough style, but are all still all clear and easy to use.

[SPOILER ALERT!]

The plot to *Crouching Wizard, Smashing Hammer* is quite simple. Indeed, it does not need to be complicated; after all, it is catering Viking warriors, and who needs confused Vikings? It is a cold night in Midguard and the Pillagers are revelling at a feast given by Alberic, the chief of their village. The festivities are interrupted when the door to the long house is thrown open to the elements and the infamously evil Red Wizard stalks in, demanding to take advantage of the well known generosity of table of all Vikings and Chief Alberic in particular. When the chief inquires as to his guest's business, the evil Red Wizard cackles and demands the fealty of the village! This being a Viking adventure, mayhem naturally ensues...

Crouching Wizard, Smashing Hammer is broken down into three encounters, which gives room for the person running the adventure to insert encounters of their own or other players to run encounters they may also have created. Ideally this adventure is suited to having one or two encounters inserted between those already given. The first in *Crouching Wizard, Smashing Hammer* takes place in the pillagers' home village and is their first encounter with the evil Red Wizard. Having delivered his ultimatum, the evil Red Wizard unleashes Ice Wights upon the feasters and



disappears after the fight. Ice Wights are described as a "chilling new foe" for the game and are the animated corpses of Viking warriors who died in the cold snow of winter.

Our heroes being heroes (and if they are not, then they are definitely in the wrong game), decide to travel to the evil Red Wizard's tower on Gruignir Mountain, after of course, taking up the opportunity to boast of how they will take his head. This journey is the subject of the second encounter. It introduces a second new monster -- the fearsome MechaDwarf, which is oppressing the town of Lutethorsk after the inhabitants rose up against the rule of the evil Red Wizard. Hopefully, after the pillagers have aided the townspeople against their oppressors, they can finally reach Gruignir Mountain in the third and final encounter. Reaching the tower entails a long climb, a run in with a thankfully not hungry man-eating giant -- also called Gruignir and a potential ally -- before the pillagers can reach their objective and storm the headquarters of the evil Red Wizard.

[END SPOILER ALERT!]

Besides providing the *Rune* narrator with two new monsters (the Ice Wight and MechaDwarf), what *Crouching Wizard, Smashing Hammer* really gives the buyer and his group of players an evening's worth of entertainment for a great price. Further, it is all but ready to run upon purchase -- the experienced *Rune* referee should be able to prepare this adventure in less than an hour. *Crouching Wizard, Smashing Hammer* is an absolute must-have buy for the *Rune* RPG, and hopefully, Atlas Games will give us more of its ilk, as well as more extended adventures.

Oh, and did I mention that the title is really great?

--*Matthew Pook*

Chainmail -- Why Bother?

Optional Rules for Misunderstood Armor

by Dan Howard

Introduction

During the playtest for *GURPS Low-Tech* there was a great deal of discussion and disagreement regarding chainmail and how to represent it accurately using *GURPS* mechanics. The reason for the differences of opinion was due to the wide variations of historical examples, the inconsistency in naming the various styles of chainmail, and the inaccuracy of "chainmail" as represented in the *Basic Set* (see p.B210).

Only two points were agreed upon: that the *Basic Set* chainmail was too heavy, and that standard chainmail offered less protection vs impaling and crushing attacks than it did vs cutting. In the *Basic Set* chainmail is just as effective against crushing attacks as it is against cutting. This is universally acknowledged to be untrue -- chainmail offered poor resistance to crushing blows. In *Low-Tech* the only concession permitted was the inclusion of padded cloth in its weight on p. B210. This effectively reduced the weight of unlayered chainmail from 25 lbs. down to 19 lbs. When compared to historical evidence, however, even this weight is far too high. And chainmail still falsely offers good protection against crushing damage.

The other major problem with *GURPS* chainmail is that most evidence seems to suggest that it offered better protection than scale armor. In *GURPS* this is reversed; plate provides the best protection followed by scale, and then chainmail. The difficulty is that there doesn't seem to have been many experiments comparing the various types of damage (cut, cr, imp) to various armor types -- namely chainmail and scale. Did scale offer better protection against arrows? Did chainmail provide better protection against sword cuts?

Chainmail was certainly easier to maintain and repair than scale. It was also a fraction of its weight. This makes it perfect for layering with other armor types (see Layering Armor below).

This exercise is an attempt to break down chainmail into the individual factors contributing to its defence capability and then approximate these using *GURPS* mechanics. It will show the full spectrum of the main types and manufacturing methods of chainmail. Armed with this, a gamer should be able to pull a sample out of a museum catalogue, or examine a mailed warrior in a painting or sculpture, and develop a reasonably realistic *GURPS* model with these optional rules.

Mail (*Maille*)

Standard mail consists of metal rings, each one linked through four others, two in the row above it and two below. The resultant mesh gives a strong, flexible armor that provides excellent protection against most cutting blows. As there were only the interlinking rings to give it form, mail suffered little from wear and could be repaired even when badly damaged. Note that 'mail' is the correct medieval term, probably derived through the French *maille* and Italian *maglia*, from the Latin *macula* meaning the mesh of a net. "chainmail" was not coined until the 18th century.

Mail was relatively easy to make with a minimum of tools. There was no need for large steel plates, so it could be made from small off-cuts. It was flexible, and it 'breathed' well compared to more rigid armors, so was less uncomfortable to wear, and more suitable for warmer climates.

The disadvantages of mail over other cuirasses were that its manufacture was an extremely long and tedious process, its high surface area meant that it rusted quickly, it was susceptible to impaling and crushing blows, and all the weight

of mail was born by the shoulders rather than being evenly distributed over the body like rigid armor. A method of relieving the shoulders of some of the burden was to wear a tightly drawn belt around the waist. This distributed some of the weight onto the hips, but it also introduced extra points of contact on the body, which was not desirable.

Mail did not offer the best protection when worn snugly against the body. It worked best when it hung loosely, moving freely during combat, with a degree of slack that partially cushioned the force of an incoming blow. Historical examples sometimes show extra reinforcing or bunching of links in spots that were in direct contact with the body, i.e. the shoulders and waist, to compensate for the lack of slack in these areas. The loose fit also enabled women to wear mail with no more difficulty than men, and individual tailoring was minimized.

Constructing Mail

Mail manufacture was a long and tedious exercise, but relatively easy and the basic techniques could be learned in less than an hour. Apprentices were often given monotonous tasks such as creating the rings and assembling the easier body sections. There were a few specialised tools involved, but all of them were fairly light and portable. A mail workshop could be set up in the field with little difficulty -- especially if pre-fabricated wire was part of the baggage.

Drawing Wire

Before assembly of the mail could be started, the armorer needed wire of the appropriate thickness or "gauge." This was usually created by pulling a rod through progressively smaller holes in a draw-plate. Wire could also be fashioned by beating small pieces into shape or by cutting thin strips off a larger steel plate. Manufacturing wire was a fairly laborious process, but relatively easy. Most blacksmiths would have had little trouble (Armory 10+, or Blacksmith 10+). No skill roll is required, but wire drawing is difficult to perform without the correct equipment. Wire drawing usually takes about three hours per pound.

Forming Links

The wire was wound into a spring-like coil around a long cylinder -- called a "winding rod" or "mandrel." This was then chiseled or sawn along its length to produce individual links with offset ends. Sometimes the links were individually nipped, enabling the ends of each link to overlap in the process. A hand-held press called a "swage" was then sometimes used to slightly flatten the links and prepare them for joining (giving each link a slightly rectangular cross-section). A hammer and anvil could also be used for this process. In Islamic countries the swage was sometimes used to stamp a decorative design onto the ring. Forming links was both easy and tedious. It was often delegated to apprentices and no skill roll is required. It takes about two hours per pound. Improvised tools will increase production time by +50%.

Joining Links

Mail was formed by joining the rings together, usually into a standard four-link arrangement. Each ring was connected to four other rings, two above and two below, so that the rows were staggered. This was a very time-consuming process; an average of 10,000-12,000 rings were needed to complete one mail shirt! Again, no skill roll is required although inexperience would increase production time. An Armory skill of less than 12 would increase the production time by +25% per point. For example, an apprentice with a skill of 10 would take +50% longer to finish the job.

There were three main methods of joining links: butting, riveting, and welding. *Low-Tech* states that it takes five hours/pound to create mail (p. LT44). This assumes that two people (possibly an armorer and his apprentice) are working together to draw the wire, form the links, and assemble them together into a finished article of standard light mail (see below). It takes approximately the same amount of time to draw the wire and form the links as it does to join the links together, so one person working by himself will take twice as long (10 hours/pound). Factors such as improvised tools, heavier wire gauges, higher concentrations of links, and advanced joining techniques, will also increase production time.

Butted mail: Butting involves simply pressing the links closed in a circle, and relying on the strength of the metal to keep them together. Thicker wire (see Double mail below) was often used to reduce the likelihood of links coming apart, or "unbutting." This method only really requires two pairs of pliers or tongs and improvising these will only increase production time by about +25%. Historically this type of armor was fairly uncommon. It was used most often in Persia, India, Asia, and Japan.

Riveted mail: Each link was inserted into the mail suit and riveted closed. It seems to have been a very time-consuming method, but the overwhelming number of historical examples are of riveted mail. There is no doubt that armorers used specialised tools to speed up the process, but these tools and techniques have largely been lost. Some historians and modern armorers have attempted to recreate the traditional techniques.

Once the ring was formed and pressed, the overlapping ends were pierced, either with a hammer and punch, or a special pair of tongs. The ring was then inserted into the mail suit, and secured with a sliver of steel or bronze through the pierced hole. This was then riveted by a second pair of tongs with recesses in the jaws. It is possible that the piercing and riveting was done all in one step using a single tool. This would have helped to reduce production time. Riveting is a fairly simple process and requires no skill roll. It takes +25% longer to rivet links than it does to simply butt them together. There are a few specialized tools required for this method and improvising these will increase production time by a further +50%.

Welded mail: The most preferable, albeit time-consuming, method of joining links. It was extremely rare for these links to come apart as a result of a single blow and, as such, provided the best protection possible against impaling attacks. The links were heated up and forge-welded, one at a time, on an anvil. Half of the links were welded before inserting them into the armor, and the other half afterwards. It was a delicate process and required the skills of an experienced armorer (Armory 14+). Welding links is the most demanding of joining techniques and doubles production time. This process was impossible to perform without a small anvil, a simple forge with hand bellows, and light smithing tools. These tools cannot be improvised, but would be fairly easy to transport.

Some types of mail combined rows of riveted rings with rows of pre-welded, or punched rings. This would have reduced assembly time as only half of the links would need to be joined once they had been inserted into the mail suit. Treat this type as riveted mail. Overall, production time would have been about the same. The second stage, forming the links, would have taken longer, but the last stage, actually assembling the links into mail, would have been quicker. Some sort of "mass production" method for producing pre-fabricated rings would therefore have been beneficial.

Finishing

When the suit was completed it was likely to have been "oil quenched" to temper it and give some degree of rust-proofing. Sometimes the armor was "blackened" to further improve rust resistance. This involved coating the armor with "dirty" or used oil (e.g. linseed or olive oil) and burning it off. A more effective method was to boil the armor in a pot of oil until the oil "cooked" into the steel, and then burning off the excess. The result was a glossy black finish.

Decoration

The structure of mail limits its potential for decoration. The lack of any flat surfaces restrict the use of techniques such as embossing and engraving. Although, as stated above, some Islamic armorers embossed designs onto links. Even more intricate designs could be painstakingly engraved onto individual rings (verses from the Koran, for example). This would greatly increase production time (at least 2-3 times) and the final cost would be much higher. In most cases, however, decoration of mail seems to have been mainly limited to using bronze or copper rings as decorative rows along the edges of the armor. Gilting was sometimes performed, coating the links with a thin layer of gold plate. Japanese armorers lacquered mail links in different colours -- although black seems to have been most common. This method was time-consuming, but afforded excellent rust protection. Lacquering had an added advantage: it greatly reduced the noise the armor produced and cut down on glare and reflections. Because of this, lacquered armor would be ideal for those requiring stealth, such as thieves.

Maintaining Mail

Although mail was very easy to repair, it was highly susceptible to rust, and techniques had to be developed to help prevent deterioration. As previously mentioned, mail can be "blackened," gilded, or lacquered at the time of construction to improve rust resistance -- although it didn't stop rusting completely. A common method of removing rust from mail was to put it into a barrel with some sand (and sometimes vinegar or urine). The barrel was sealed and rolled along the ground. The sand scrubbed the rust off the links. If kept in good repair and maintained regularly, the same suit of mail can be used by many generations of warriors.

Rust-Proofing

Mail must be regularly maintained each month or it will deteriorate. If the optional [Armor Damage Rules](#) are being used, a normal suit of mail will gain 1 penetration every two months if it is not maintained. After 20 months of neglect, it will be reduced to 'cheap' quality (losing -1DR) and eventually be completely useless. Rust-proofing a piece of armor will reduce the amount of maintenance required.

Blackening will reduce the amount of deterioration to a third (i.e. 1 penetration point for every 6 months of neglect). +20% to cost and production time.

Gilting reduces deterioration to 1 point every 3 years. It is counted as 'very fine' decoration and the armorer needs Jeweller 12+ to perform this process. Gilded armor costs 5x (gold plate is expensive) and production time is doubled.

Lacquering reduces deterioration to 1 point every 5 years. It is counted as 'fine' decoration. 3x cost and production time. Lacquering wears off over time and needs to be reapplied (once every 3 years). If not, the armor will deteriorate an extra point every time a lacquer coating was missed (1 point every three years).

Keeping a suit of armor permanently coated with oil and stored in a cool, dry environment will totally prevent deterioration. This is not practical for armor that is worn regularly though. Plate armor was sometimes coated on the inside with asphaltum (similar to roofing tar) as a tough, flexible waterproof coating. If worn regularly, armor is more at risk from rusting out from the inside due to sweat and condensation than it is from the outside.

Armor Quality

Cheap armor: Just as with weapons, armor can be of varying quality. If an armorer used inferior materials, or cut a few corners during manufacture, the end result will be a little shoddy. 'Cheap' armor would be useful for mass-produced items that needed to be manufactured quickly and cheaply.

If an armorer wanted to make 'cheap' armor, its manufacture time and cost is 75% of normal. Subtract -1 from all DRs (minimum 1). For example (see Mail Types below): 'cheap' riveted double mail would take 94 hrs to produce and cost \$630. DR reduces to 5/2/3. If the optional [Armor Damage Rules](#) are being used, then the armor becomes more susceptible to damage. An optional rule is to keep the DR the same but increase the weight by +20%. This is a reflection of the use of poorer quality materials in its construction. Remember not to add padding until after the final weight and price have been determined. All metal armor (scale, plate, etc.) can have a 'cheap' version. As stated above (see Rust-Proofing), this could also be applied to any armor that was permitted to accumulate a significant amount of rust, i.e. any armor that was not properly maintained would eventually become 'cheap'.

Merchants might sometimes attempt to pass cheap armor off as good quality armor and charge full price. A successful skill roll vs Armory, Blacksmith, or Merchant would enable the PCs to tell the difference (default rolls are appropriate).

Fine armor: Compendium II (sidebar p.CII43) allows for superior armor to weigh 10% less. Add +25% to cost and manufacture time.

Very fine armor weighs 20% less. Cost and manufacture time is doubled. It is extremely rare and only a master armorer (Armory 20+) could attempt to make it.

Ring Size and Spacing

Rings could vary greatly in size. The greater the diameter of the ring, the thicker the gauge of wire that could be used, or the more links that could be joined to the central link. As far as GURPS mechanics are concerned, only the very extremes of diameter and thickness would produce any variation in the amount of protection afforded. Low-Tech distinguishes between various wire thicknesses by including an entry for double mail (p.LT98). This allows for mail links weighing twice that of standard mail. Thus standard, or light mail, is on the bottom end of the scale.

Protection

Butted mail was extremely susceptible to impaling blows. The links often came open during this sort of attack, allowing the missile to punch through without slowing significantly. This drawback is reflected in the reduced PD and DR of chainmail in the Basic Set (see p.B210). Riveted mail, however, protected reasonably well against impaling attacks, and welded mail was even better again. The existing rules for chainmail do not take this into account.

All mail was susceptible to crushing blows -- only the padding beneath it prevented serious damage to the receiver of such an attack. Standard light mail only provides PD1, DR2 against crushing attacks, and most of this is due to the padding underneath. Without padding, light mail only provides PD0, DR1 against crushing attacks and is pretty much useless.

Here is the new standard "chainmail" entry for a mail shirt (sometimes called a byrnie). It protects areas 9-11, 17-18. PD and DR includes padded cloth worn underneath, but the weight does not. This is necessary to enable the various types listed below to be calculated properly.

Light mail shirt, butted: PD3 (cut), PD1 (cr./imp.); DR4 (cut) DR2, (cr./imp.); 10 lbs.

Construction time is $10 \times 5 = 50$ hours.

Basic Set and **Low-Tech** both list the cost of "chainmail" at \$230. This includes padded cloth so the base cost is only \$200. When looking at the manufacture time and the cost of raw materials, this price is far too cheap. Historically, a suit of mail often cost more than a good warhorse. Realistic armor prices will be the subject of a later article. For now this price will be used for the light mail shirt mentioned above and multipliers will be applied for modifications to this basic design.

Here is a list of new weights for different hit locations:

Light mail shirt, butted (areas 9-11, 17-18): 10 lbs.; \$200.

Light mail coif, butted (areas 3-4, 5): 2 lbs.; \$50.

Light mail sleeves, butted (areas 6, 8): 5 lbs.; \$50.

Light mail leggings, butted (areas 12-14): 8 lbs.; \$90.

Light mail gauntlets, butted (area 7): 1 lb.; \$45.

Light mail sabatons, butted (areas 15-16): 2 lbs.; \$45.

Modifying

Mail can be modified in two ways: linking method, and manufacturing style. Both of these can be combined to improve the protection provided by mail. A table laying out various combinations can be found below.

Linking

This determines how easy it is for the individual links to open up, thus governing how effective the mail is against impaling attacks.

Butted: This should be considered the basic technique for joining links and this method is used to determine the stats of standard light mail. It provides little protection against impaling attacks. If the optional [Armor Damage Rules](#) are being used then butted mail counts for two penetrations of the armor for every impaling attack that gets through. Fortunately butted mail is easy to repair and takes half the repair time normally required. Repair cost is also halved.

Riveted: A small rivet often prevented the links from coming apart when hit with a missile. It adds +1PD (imp.) and +1DR (imp.) Weight is the same; Cost is 2x.

Welded: The best method of joining links. TL4+ types of mail almost always used this method, which provides the best mail defence against impaling attacks. Welding adds +1PD (imp.) and +2DR (imp.) Weight is the same; Cost is 3x.

Style

Advanced mail manufacturing techniques can improve its defence capability. Only one style can be utilised at a time. You can't, for example, combine bar mail with fine-mesh thus doubly improving its PD and DR.

Light Mail: Should be considered the 'standard' type of mail. The links are on the lower end of the thickness scale and have a similar outside diameter to other types listed here. Reducing the diameter of the links would increase the total number of links required. In game terms there would be no effect until the links were quite small. The result of this would be Fine-Mesh mail -- see below.

Augmented Mail (p.LT98): Flexible leather strips are woven vertically through the mail to improve its protection. It offers +1DR (cut/cr.); Weight 120%; Cost 120%. The augmentation is performed after the mail is completed.

Bar Mail: Similar to augmented mail except that thin metal splints are added instead of leather strips. Hand and foot protection cannot be made from this. It provides +2DR (cut) and +1DR (cr./imp.); Weight 180%; Cost 180%.

Double Mail (p.LT98): The wire used in making these links is twice the weight of light mail (about 40% thicker). It provides +1PD (all attacks); +2DR (cut) and +1DR (cr./imp.); Weight 2x; Cost 2x. These stats can also be used for mail that utilises light rings of the standard diameter, but twice as many of them -- the resulting mesh has smaller gaps.

Triple Mail: Extremely rare. The wire used for these links weighs three times that of light mail. Because of this, the inside diameter is relatively small -- individual links do not move as freely through each other and flexibility is compromised. Despite this, it provides excellent defence, but is extremely cumbersome to wear. Hand and foot protection cannot be made from triple mail. It is the heaviest armor available, adding +1PD and +2DR against all attacks; Weight 3x; Cost 250%.

Combined Mail: Combines small steel plates with mail for greatly improved protection. This is by far the most effective type of mail armor and was used in both Europe and Japan. It was preferred in Japan over their traditional lamellar armor, which was laced together with silk. Low-Tech calls this Laminated steel (see p.LT115). Hand and foot protection cannot be made from combined mail. It adds +1PD and +2DR against all attacks; Weight 2x; Cost 3x. These links were always fairly heavy and should be treated as double mail.

Fine-Mesh Mail (p.CII43 sidebar): Small rings linked closely together result in a fine mesh with the consistency of heavy cloth. While not found much in Europe until the Renaissance, there is evidence to suggest that fine-mesh was utilised in both the Roman and Islamic worlds. Mail with links of diameters as small as 3mm have been found at archaeological sites. The rings are very small and each one must be individually welded (they cannot be butted or riveted). Fine-mesh provides PD3 (cut./imp.), PD1 (cr.); DR3 (cut./imp.), DR1 (cr.); Weight is the same; Cost 9x; Production time 9x (45 hours/pound).

Note that this is the only mail that provides full protection without any sort of padding, and is ideal for wearing under

clothing. Therefore, if fine-mesh were layered with padded cloth or leather, the DRs would combine. However, mail is notorious for staining and tearing clothing, so a protective layer of cloth (PDO; DR0; Cost \$10; Weight 1 lb.) is recommended. Sometimes the fine-mesh could be purchased already sewn onto a cloth or soft leather shirt.

Note also that this supercedes the entries in *Low-Tech* for armored shirt and reinforced coif. Both of these items are made from fine-mesh mail -- use the above stats. Fine-mesh is excellent for concealment and gives +3 to any Holdout roll (see p.LT98). Wearing padding underneath would decrease the Holdout bonus to +1.

Padding

Mail is next to useless if no padding is worn underneath. Remember to add padded cloth underneath all mail except fine-mesh to determine actual weight and price. A padded shirt is often called an aketon or arming doublet. The latter was a later innovation (early 15th century) and was equipped with points to attach mail gussets and pieces of armor. *Basic Set* and *Low-Tech* both give it a weight of 6 lbs. There doesn't seem to be any historical evidence to suggest that this sort of armor, whether layered felt or quilted cloth, weighed any more than about 4 lbs. Modern reconstructions support this. Quilted gambesons may have weighed 6 lbs., but they reached down to the knees (see Hauberks, below).

If your GM agrees, then the weight of padded cloth (areas 9-11, 17-18) should be reduced to 4 lbs. Using double mail as an example, the total weight of this, including padded cloth, would be 24 lbs. It would seem that the authors of *Basic Set* used a sample of this type of armor to determine the weight of "chainmail" (see p.B210). This explains the discrepancy between this weight and the numerous museum samples, which are generally much lighter.

Mail Types

Here is a breakdown of the described mail types including layered padded cloth (where required).

Torso (Areas 9-11, 17-18) Description	PD (cut/cr/imp)	DR (cut/cr/imp)	Weight (lbs)	Cost	Production Time
Light Mail shirt, Butted	3/1/1	4/2/2	14	\$230	50 hrs
Light Mail shirt, Riveted	3/1/2	4/2/3	14	\$430	63 hrs
Light Mail shirt, Welded	3/1/2	4/2/4	14	\$630	100 hrs
Augmented Mail shirt, Butted	3/1/1	5/3/2	16	\$270	60 hrs
Augmented Mail shirt, Riveted	3/1/2	5/3/3	16	\$510	75 hrs
Augmented Mail shirt, Welded	3/1/2	5/3/4	16	\$750	120 hrs
Bar Mail shirt, Butted	3/1/1	6/3/3	22	\$390	90 hrs
Bar Mail shirt, Riveted	3/1/2	6/3/4	22	\$750	113 hrs
Bar Mail shirt, Welded	3/1/2	6/3/5	22	\$1110	180 hrs
Double Mail shirt, Butted	4/2/2	6/3/3	24	\$430	100 hrs
Double Mail shirt, Riveted	4/2/3	6/3/4	24	\$830	125 hrs
Double Mail shirt, Welded	4/2/3	6/3/5	24	\$1230	200 hrs
Triple Mail shirt, Butted	4/2/2	6/4/4	34	\$530	150 hrs
Triple Mail shirt, Riveted	4/2/3	6/4/5	34	\$1030	188 hrs
Triple Mail shirt, Welded	4/2/3	6/4/6	34	\$1530	300 hrs
Combined Mail shirt, Butted	4/2/2	6/4/4	24	\$630	125 hrs

Combined Mail shirt, Riveted	4/2/3	6/4/5	24	\$1230	157 hrs
Combined Mail shirt, Welded	4/2/3	6/4/6	24	\$1830	250 hrs
Fine-Mesh Mail shirt, Welded (No padded cloth)	3/1/3	3/1/3	10	\$1800	450 hrs

The above system might seem complicated, but the actual amount of book-keeping involved is only slightly more than that which GURPS already requires of mail, and is far more realistic and adaptable.

Layering Armor

Low-Tech states that any armor can be worn over any other, subject to GM approval (see p.LT114). The reduced weights listed above make mail a very favourable option when layered with other types of armor. Butted light mail worn under a plate corselet gives PD 4 and DR 10/8/8 and only weighs 48 lbs. The catch is that massive amounts of armor are bulky and hamper movement:

For every point by which the DR of the inner layers (every layer but the outermost layer) exceeds 3, reduce the wearer's effective DX by -1. (see p.LT114).

In the case of mail the DR varies. To solve this simply average the three DRs.

Butted light mail: $(4 + 2 + 2)/3 = 8/3 = 2.67$. Because it does not exceed 3 there is no DX reduction. If Butted augmented mail was layered instead, the average DR would be 3.33 and so a DX penalty of -1 would be applied to the wearer.

Optional Extras

Blunt trauma: Often when a mail-cladded defender was struck with an impaling or cutting weapon, even though the mail prevented the attack from piercing the skin, the impact of the blow often left severe bruising or cracked bones. GURPS already has blunt trauma damage for Kevlar vests (see p.B211) and the same rule can be applied to mail with a small modification:

When all of the damage in a cutting or impaling attack is absorbed by the armor, any rolls of 6 on any damage dice result in one point of crushing damage per 6 rolled being applied to the wearer.

For example, a warrior wearing combined mail is cut with a sword doing 2d-1 damage. The attacker rolls a 6 and a 1 (total 7), which results in 6 points of damage. This is totally absorbed by the armor but, because a 6 was rolled, the defender takes 1 point of crushing damage. This rule could be applied to all flexible armor types such as scale and padded cloth. Suddenly that hail of Halfling shortbow arrows, which was once considered only a nuisance, now becomes much more deadly.

Hauberks: The mail shirt is extended into a long skirt that falls down to the knees (protecting areas 9-11, 12-14, 17-18). It is split either up the sides for infantry, or front and back for cavalry. All types of mail can be hauberks. Manufacturing a hauberk adds +50% to the cost, weight, and production time of a mail shirt. This type of protection leaves the shins exposed, however, and any attack that hits the legs will strike the exposed part on a roll of 4-6. Hauberks can be made from any flexible armor type. Cloth hauberks are normally called gambesons.

Edged mail: European mail was smooth -- designed to deflect weapons by rolling them off the wearer. In some cultures, such as China, mail could be fashioned with edges and protruding pieces designed to catch an enemy's sword, thus preventing him from parrying the defender's counterstrike. This armor could also cause 1 point of cutting damage to anyone who brushed against it and may cut the wearer if he attempted to dress or undress too quickly. No armor can be layered over the top of this, but armor may be layered underneath (see Layering Armor, above).

This modification can be done to any type of mail. Cost and production time is doubled; PD (cut) is reduced by -1. However, it stands a chance of causing the attacker's weapon to get stuck in the links. If the defender gets a critical success on his Defense roll against a cutting attack, the attacker's weapon is automatically stuck as per p.B96 (sidebar) for 1 turn. Note: this happens instead of the normal rule that requires the attacker to roll on the Critical Miss Table (see p.B110). Each round afterwards, the attacker must make a Weapons roll. Success results in his weapon coming free (unlike the rules on p.B96, it causes no damage). A critical failure also results in the weapon coming free, but the attacker must then roll on the Critical Miss Table (see p.B202).

Other Materials

Bronze: Although bronze is difficult to draw into wire, it was occasionally used for making mail. Bronze mail is +20% heavier than an equivalent piece of steel mail. Cost is 80% and manufacture time remains unchanged.

High-tech steel alloys add +1 to all DRs but have no effect on weight. Cost is doubled. In a fantasy setting this could be equivalent to something like Dwarven steel if they had superior metallurgical skills.

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Many thanks to Thomas Barnes, Peter Dell'Orto, and Sean Punch.

Talking About It

On Tuesday morning it was no longer normal to greet people with "Hello." Instead it was: "Have you heard?"

My conversation with my boss Tuesday morning consisted of:

Me: "Have you heard?"

Him: "Have *you* heard?"

It soon became apparent that, indeed, we had heard.

Wednesday morning greetings were replaced with, "Have you heard anything new?"

My personal Wednesday was taken up waiting at the Blood Mobile. Although my friend and I were there when it opened at 11 AM, many others were there before us. Three hours of waiting in line later they informed us that 1) They had all the blood they needed, and 2) they really had all the blood they could *handle* at the time. They said they'd call those of us on the list that didn't get a chance to give. We left. (In hindsight I'm grateful; I hadn't even considered that, days before, I was sick. It certainly didn't feel like days before. It felt like grade school feels now.)

While waiting in line, we all knew *why* we were waiting in line. But none of us could really talk about it. Certainly we chatted, but it was always in careful terms. "I've heard they were armed with knives and box cutters." "I hear they're worried another one might collapse." "My friend was visiting there just last June." "They haven't released any numbers yet, but they're saying thousands if not tens of thousands."

Even now, almost three days later, I'm really not able to talk about it. I've spoken with friends and relatives about implications, effects, worries, and feelings . . . but not *it*. Everything but it.

There are times that exist solely by the shock, and the inability to formulate adequate words.

- December 7th.
- November 22nd.

And, now, September 11th.

They say life imitates art, and vice versa. If so, then I feel we -- instinctively -- know that *not* talking directly has a power, an awe and reflective demeanor.

This is something writers, filmmakers, and other artists know; we don't need to see it, hear it, or be told it to be affected. A shadow, a hint, and things unsaid have a great power. We don't need to be told about the monster, the horror, the gut-wrenching agony. We know about it.

The unspoken dialog in *Remains of the Day* is gut-wrenching. By the end I was desperate for the protagonists to talk to each other, yelling -- silently -- at the screen for them to communicate.

T.S. Eliot's *The Hollow Men* continues to fill me with dread, even though it doesn't *say* much of anything directly.

My father was never judgmental regarding my career path . . . or seeming lack thereof. My first published work in *Shadis* appeared the week my father died. I gave him a copy at his funeral. I'd never had a chance to mention that I was, at that point, a published writer.

Numbers are, at their core, meaningless to us. We hear them, and we know logically that they represent horrible facts. But unless we experience them directly, or have some connection to the events, they don't grip us.

- 20,000 people died in India from an earthquake on January 26th this year.
- 40,000 people died in car accidents in the US last year.
- 100,000 Iraqis died in the Gulf War.
- 27,000,000 Russians died in World War II.

Facts are, on the whole, equally unreal.

A day before the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., was shot, he was informed of the potential for harm against him. According to the Rev. Andrew Young, he was not worried, since King felt he had "reached the peak of fulfillment with his non-violent movement." King was 39 at the time of his death.

Two months later, an assassin walked up to presidential hopeful Robert Kennedy and shot him. Kennedy had just excited his supporters after the California primary by saying, "On to Chicago! Let's win there!"

It was a leaky joint in a solid rocket booster that caused the explosion of the space shuttle *Challenger* on January 28th, 1986, killing the seven crewmembers aboard.

It's the feelings -- those in our hearts, our minds, and our souls -- that are the most real. And, usually, the most hushed.

It's why so many of our parents and grandparents are so quiet. The Great Depression and World War II provided more than their opportunities to remain in silence.

We know what frightens us. We know what makes us cry. We know what makes us stare in disbelief at an empty skyline.

But words aren't enough to convey it.

--*Steven Marsh*

The Art Of Vestiomancy

(Or, Why A Wizard Should Wear Funny Robes And A Pointy Hat)

A Prestige Class for d20

by Jody Macgregor

Vestiomancy is a unique means of spell-casting. Vestiomancers (also known as 'weaver wizards') sew sigils; representations of spells, directly onto their robes -- effectively wearing their spellbooks. They are reliant on accoutrements in general, requiring their staves and conical hats to be at their most efficient.

Wizards are most commonly vestiomancers, though sorcerers and even bards may join the class. As NPCs, vestiomancers are often eccentric, subscribing as they do to a very localised form of spellcasting. Most vestiomancers remain attached to the College of Vestiomancy described below, even if in an unofficial capacity.

Vestiomancer

Hit die: d4

Lvl	Atk	Fort	Ref	Will	Special	Spells per day
1	+0	+0	+0	+2	Vestments	+1 level of existing class
2	+1	+0	+0	+3		+1 level of existing class
3	+1	+1	+1	+3	Hidden Sigil	+1 level of existing class
4	+2	+1	+1	+4	Staff 2 feats	+1 level of existing class
5	+2	+1	+1	+4	Hidden Sigil	+1 level of existing class
6	+3	+2	+2	+5	Staff 3 feats	+1 level of existing class
7	+3	+2	+2	+5	Hidden Sigil	+1 level of existing class
8	+4	+2	+2	+6	Staff 4 feats	+1 level of existing class
9	+4	+3	+3	+6	Hidden Sigil	+1 level of existing class
10	+5	+3	+3	+7	Circle Founding	+1 level of existing class

Requirements

Spellcasting: Ability to cast 3rd level arcane magic.

Craft (sewing): 8 ranks

Feats: Craft Wondrous Item

Special: Must have graduated from the College of Vestiomancy, reaching Investiture. It is up to the DM to determine exactly how long this takes.

Class Skills

Skill Points at Each Level: 4 + Int modifier.

The vestiomancer's class skills are: Alchemy (Int), Concentration (Con), Craft (Int), Forgery (Int), Knowledge (Int), Profession (Wis), Scry (Int), Speak Language, Spellcraft (Int), Use Magic Device (Cha, exclusive skill).

Class Features

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: Vestiomancers gain no proficiency in any weapon or armor. Note that armor check penalties for armor heavier than leather apply to the skills Balance, Climb, Escape Artist, Hide, Jump, Move Silently, Pick Pocket, and Tumble.

Spells: A vestiomancer casts arcane spells. When a new level of vestiomancer is gained, the character gains new spells per day as if gaining a level of a normal spellcasting class. If the character was multiclass, the player must choose which class to advance. Other class abilities, like a wizard's bonus feats, are not gained.

Vestments: The robes, staff and hat of the vestiomancer, each of which radiates a low-level aura to Detect Magic and similar effects, though the multiple magic types involved confuse such spells.

Robes: Vestiomantic robes are covered in sigils, runes and pictograms which represent spells. To prepare their spells, vestiomancers must be wearing their robes. While robed, they also gain a free spell slot of each level they can cast. With a Spellcraft check (DC 15) a vestiomancer can read another's robes and get a rough estimate of caster level and spell specialization.

Specialist wizards who become vestiomancers can prepare a second robe to change their specialization. They must make the decision when gaining a level of vestiomancer and the effect is permanent. The wizard may either choose to change specialization (or choose to move from universal to specialized), or choose to not be specialized anymore. Any spells previously known but now denied to the wizard can no longer be cast.

Staff: Vestiomancers carry a staff, given to them as part of their vestments after the ceremony of Investiture. When vestiomancers are given their staff, they must choose one of the following metamagic feats to be imbued in it; Enlarge Spell, Extend Spell or Silent Spell. Once per day, a spell cast by the vestiomancer can be treated as though cast with the relevant feat, but takes up only its normal level spell-slot. At 4th, 6th and 8th level, the staff's use per day is increased by one. At 4th level, the staff gains another feat from the above list. At 6th level the Empower Spell and Maximize Spell feats are added to the list, and another feat is gained. At 8th level, the Quicken Spell feat is added, and a final feat is gained.

Hat: When vestiomancers put on their conical hats, they enter spellcasting mode, like a sword fighter donning a scabbard or a gunslinger putting on a holster. The hats give them a +4 bonus to all Concentration checks. They also make a good place to hide small objects, such as potions or flasks of booze.

Hidden Sigil: Vestiomancers can hide sigils inside their robes, but casting the spells woven there work differently. At 3rd level and every 2nd level thereafter, the vestiomancer chooses one of the following spells to hide:

Darkvision, Fly, Invisibility, Levitate, Protection from (Alignment), Protection from Arrows, Protection from Elements, See Invisibility.

The vestiomancer must have access to the spell, but does not need to have previously learnt the spell. Each Hidden Sigil may be cast once per day with no preparation or components, and does not consume a spell slot. The spell is cast at the level of the vestiomancer, and the casting time is instantaneous (though only one may be cast per round). Spells may be taken as Hidden Sigils more than once.

Circle Founding: At 10th level a vestiomancer has earned enough respect to create a new circle. A circle is a group of vestiomancers with similar views and goals who work together for the benefit of all. Founding your own circle effectively lets a vestiomancer attract a group of likeminded and powerful spellcasters who can be given orders and called on for aid. See the section below for some examples of circles.

The College Of Vestiomancy

The College of Vestiomancy is situated in a generic fantasy city near you. Wizards from far and wide flock there to study this unique form of spellcasting from its masters. The College itself researches magic as a means of furthering

knowledge, and tries to play little part in society, but individual graduates may prefer the acquisition of power over knowledge. The College frowns on this but is powerless to stop it.

On the College grounds are separate lecture halls for each school of magic, a well-stocked library, a craft hall, a thick-walled building for the practical examinations and a research facility (also thick-walled).

Roughly central to the library and lecture halls is the Tower of History. Here, the history of the land is presented in the form of a series of tapestries adorning the walls. It is the privilege of the highest-ranking vestiomancers to weave the newest tapestries as events unfold, and to maintain the older sections. Some parts have been lost due to theft and fire, so this is not a complete history that a layperson could understand. Also, vestiomancers sometimes encode symbolic images into the art, the meaning of which only those with inside knowledge can decode.

At the top of the Tower of History is the Tapestry of Many Sigils. All the known magical sigils are woven into it, and it is by study of this, or copies of certain portions of it, that vestiomancers learn new spells.

Rumours

- In a locked vault below the Tower of History all the future tapestries are stored. Senior vestiomancers, sworn to secrecy, don't weave the tapestries. They merely remove the next one from the vault and hang it on the wall. If someone could get access to the vault, they would know the future.
- Changes made in the historical tapestries over the years have caused history itself to change.
- In a secret room there are tapestries showing bizarre scenes that act as portals to faraway lands.

Studying Vestiomancy

Students must be sponsored by a senior vestiomancer. Sponsors are technically responsible for the actions of their protégés, but many wizards have sponsored too many to bother paying much attention to them. Study is a long and arduous process. At first students are taught mundane crafts that are necessary once they learn vestiomantic magic, although many students don't see it that way ("Knit one, pearl one, waste your life," as the younger students say). This also builds up the patience and manual dexterity required in vestiomancy. More experienced spellcasters may be rushed through the process and attend only a few lectures before applying to be examined, a process involving several written and practical tests. If you want to roll dice for this kind of thing, a Knowledge (arcane) check at DC 20 is required to pass.

After examinations, a graduation ceremony called Investiture is held. The successful students are awarded their staves and hats, and either sent out into the world or offered positions at the college as teachers or in a research capacity. Invested vestiomancers may also join a circle, a kind of magical fraternity. Each circle has different entrance requirements and traditions, holding infrequent meetings, reunions and so on. Some circles function almost like secret societies, gaining privileges in the outside world for their members, and acting as repositories for secret knowledge.

Famous Circles

The Circle of the Seven Stars: An exclusive circle for vestiomancers who pass examination in the highest percentile. They are governed by a council of seven (rather than the normal council of one), and council membership is very elitist. They are rumoured to hoard sigils that other circles, and the College, is unaware of. Their symbol is a circle made of seven stars, worn on an amulet, or inscribed onto staff or hat, as are all circle symbols.

The Circle of Extraordinary Gentlemen: The members of this circle are notorious drunkards and braggarts, who convene together irregularly to drink and swap tall stories. Many of the members are wanderers who consider College life to be stuffy and dull. Their symbol is a tankard of ale.

The Circle of the Rose and Thorn: A very secretive circle, with rumoured ties to the underworld. They claim that a conspiracy of supernatural beings secretly rules society. Some of the members wish to destroy these entities while

others wish to join them. Their symbol is a rose with a drop of blood on its thorn.

The Royal Circle: Foster relationships with the people, normally rich people. They encourage the belief that wizards are a necessary business acquisition or fashion accessory, for all the top merchants and nobles. Their symbol is a crown.

The Circle of Hunters: Hunt rogue wizards and other threats to the Colleges. They provide weaponry, mercenary henchmen and information to their members. Their symbol is an eagle's claw, normally engraved on the staff.

History Of The College

Gregor Quidam, an eccentric wizard and passionate basket-weaver, invented vestiomancy by accident after misreading references to magical robes in several ancient texts and attempting to replicate them. His discovery would have been forgotten on his death, had he not performed an important service for Lord Sohensoe. Legend says that Quidam wove a spell to destroy the nobleman's enemies, but modern sources claim that he merely effected a cure for his Lord's syphilis. Sohensoe had the College built for Quidam in gratitude, and the basket-weaver dedicated it to his own form of spellcasting. He showed a remarkable flair for organization, finding and training various hedge wizards and promising youngsters, codifying sigils into the Tapestry, and turning an actual profit before his untimely death. Some say that Quidam vanished into one of the tapestries in the Tower of History. Other sources suggest that he died of a social disease brought about by an excess of good living.

Rules Of The College

Fighting between vestiomancers is not allowed, outside of formalized duelling. Duels are also practiced as a sport, but real duels are often lethal. The two duelling vestiomancers cast spells, not at each other, but at the area around them. In sport, the object is to knock the opponent off his feet, or out of a designated area (wind and earthshaking spells are common). In battle, the object is death, or at least humiliation. Duelling is the only way that one vestiomancer may kill another without being declared rogue and becoming a target of the circle of hunters.

Vestiomancers have a strict set of laws that forbid things such as the destruction of knowledge, harming tapestries, killing other vestiomancers outside of a duel, and misusing their powers. Misuse covers magical creation of gold, as well as trafficking with demons and the undead, and stealing the livelihoods of others by doing their work for them. Working as a court wizard, or divining the future of stock for a merchant is technically illegal, but is overlooked in almost all cases. A vestiomancer should also never refuse aid to a mundane cloth-weaver out of a sense of solidarity, but this is more a matter of honour than law and is safely ignored. The punishment for the other crimes is death, normally dealt out by the circle of hunters. Even in the case of rogue vestiomancers, killing outside of a duel is illegal.

Murphy's Rules



by John Kovalic

Murphy's Rules



Murphy's Rules



The Coldest War:

The Antarctic Rim in *GURPS Technomancer*

by Loki Carbis

"I watched the sky a long time, concluding that such beauty was reserved for distant, dangerous places, and that nature has good reason for exacting her own special sacrifices from those determined to witness them."

-- Alone by Admiral Richard E. Byrd

Unlike its more peaceful analog in our own world, the Antarctic Rim in *GURPS Technomancer* is among the most dangerous and hard-fought of territories in the world. The major reason for this is the Zhukov Hellstorm, the larger and more powerful cousin of the Trinity Hellstorm. But unlike Trinity, Zhukov is not located within the territory of any one nation.

Antarctic History

Before 1949, not much attention was paid to the region. But the ready access to magical energies provided by the Zhukov detonation inspired the interests of many nations. Argentina, Chile, Australia, New Zealand, France, Norway, the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom and the United States all had interests in the area -- mostly scientific research bases or territorial claims. After Zhukov, these nations were joined by several others, including South Africa, China and Japan.

In the pre-Zhukov days of Antarctic exploration and science, a somewhat utopian spirit prevailed. All were visitors, and all were tacitly encouraged to leave petty nationalism above the 60th Parallel. Post-Zhukov, this attitude was replaced by a vastly more pragmatic and world-weary outlook. Antarctica had become a strategically vital possession, and all other nations were to be treated with suspicion at best -- hostility at worst. The arrival of the Chinese on the continent in 1950 raised the stakes even higher, as all three superpowers got into the act.

In 1957, in conjunction with International Geophysical Year, the Antarctic Treaty was signed. It promised a military and industrial free zone, with strict anti-pollution and anti-armament legislation. On the other hand, it also included the controversial "mutual defense" provisions that required all signatory nations to assist their fellows in keeping non-signatory nations out of Antarctica. Signatory nations included the USA, the UK, the USSR, Poland, France, both Germanies, Norway, Japan, Australia, South Africa and Chile. Notable non-signatories included China, New Zealand and Argentina. By 1965, the treaty was being routinely violated, as magical and industrial research converged, although the official story was that magical research of any sort was not covered by the treaty (which was true to the letter, if not the spirit, of the agreement).

In retrospect, the Antarctic Treaty seems to have exacerbated rather than relieved political stresses on the southernmost continent. Petty territorial disputes and a complete lockdown on scientific research exchange (due mostly to the increasingly blurry line between science and magic) contributed to the ill-feeling. More and more, Antarctic settlements became a series of heavily-armed military city-states, none really trusting the others. The Japanese government was the sole exception to this policy, with the Syowa Base having only the most minimal of defenses, and an open-door policy to everyone (although cynics on all sides claimed that this was merely an effort to steal knowledge, particularly magical knowledge, from anyone who had it). But the quick fall of the base to the attacks of the Killer Penguins in 1984 just gave hawks everywhere another reason to crow over the doves.

It is now commonly accepted that the Killer Penguins were aware of the Treaty, and exploited its weaknesses in their campaign to conquer all Antarctica. Aside from Soviet bases attacked in retribution, only non-signatory nations were targeted by the birds until 1983. By the time that Treaty signatory bases were being attacked by the Penguins, they had been sufficiently divided and made suspicious of each other that a cooperative response was nigh impossible (the

evacuation of the Syowa base is one of the very few examples of this paranoia being overcome).

Antarctic Conditions

The climactic conditions in Antarctica are possibly the most extreme in the world. Average winter temperatures range from -40F to -94F in the interior of continent, while the coastal regions range from +5F to -26F. In the summer months, the interior ranges from +5F to -31C, and the coast between +41F and -23F. (Full rules for the effects of such temperatures may be found on pp. B130 and CII133-135).

The other major climactic factor is the wind. Katabatic winds can gust up 320kph in coastal regions, and higher still near the Zhukov Hellstorm. The winds in the interior are not so severe, but the risk of getting caught in a blizzard or a whiteout is very real at all times.

The Aurora Australis is a common enough sight in the skies below 40 degrees South Latitude. Its presence depends on the interaction of solar activity, fluctuations in the earth's magnetic field and variations in the intensity of the Zhukov Hellstorm. It can reasonably be seen anywhere in the area discussed in this article, but is most common in the areas around the south magnetic pole and Zhukov Hellstorm. When it is visible in the sky, all spell casting is at +1 to skill and power -- but the effects of all backfires are rolled at +3. These effects are both doubled if the spell caster is actually on the Antarctic Ice-Cap. Curiously, the Killer Penguins seem immune to both these effects.

Political Entities in the Antarctic

Argentine Territories

It should be noted that all current Argentinean possessions were formerly claimed by the United Kingdom (and in some instances, Chile as well). These territories were all captured at the time of the Falkland invasion in 1982. These territories include South Georgia, the South Orkney Islands and the South Sandwich Islands, all of which are heavily defended by Argentinean forces. Although no one believes that the United Kingdom will allow their capture forever, the Argentinean high command is quite confident that it can hold them in the event of a counter-attack -- barring American intervention. A lot of Argentina's foreign policy objectives are thus aimed at isolating Britain from potential allies, and keeping her actual allies busy elsewhere.

Chilean Territories

See *Disputed Territories*, below.

Australasian Territories

Existing in an uneasy tension with the United States -- the nations are friends, but no longer allies, Australasia holds numerous territories, including the Auckland Islands, the Balleny Islands, Campbell Island, Heard Island, Macquarie Island and Scott Island. Of these, Macquarie Island is the site of a major naval and air force base, and the focus of much top secret military research, with Heard and the Ballenys also well garrisoned. The more northerly Aucklands and Campbells are open to tourists, while Scott Island has been declared a national park, and is closed to all human landings, except in emergencies.

French and Norwegian Territories

Although these islands are nominally under the control of France (and Norway, in the case of Bouvetoya), their extensive use by NATO forces means that they are de facto possessions of the United States. This includes Ile Amsterdam, Bouvetoya, Iles Crozet, Iles Kerguelen and Ile Saint-Paul. Peter I Island, the most inward-lying of the Norwegian possessions, fell to Killer Penguin attacks in 1987, and has been held despite repeated efforts to reclaim it.

There is some ill-feeling on the islands about the assumption of power by the American military, occasionally leading to minor acts of sabotage.

Japanese Territory

The McDonald Islands are among the most heavily settled of all the Antarctic Rim territories. Since the purchase of these islands, Japanese government and industry have spared no expense in utilizing them. In addition to a thriving magical college, the McDonald Islands boast the world's most advanced superconductivity research laboratories, extensive whaling bases (technically illegal under the terms of the sale, but no one seems to be in a hurry to do anything about it), and even a tourist resort. Permanent population is about 1200 people, plus between one thousand and three thousand transients, with the numbers peaking in the summer months. Usually about half of them are spell-casters.

The chief settlement of the McDonald Islands, a port named Mizuho, is a well-known place for clandestine meetings and a haven for spies. It is sometimes referred to as the "Casablanca of the Antarctic" and with good reason. Under the relaxed gaze of the security forces, pretty much anything not involving violence, however criminal, is tolerated (unless it would harm Japan or Japanese interests).

South African Territory

The previous territories and bases on the Antarctic continent claimed by South Africa have been lost to the Argentines (who then lost them in turn to the Killer Penguins). Now, only the bases on Prince Edward Island and Marion Island remain. Both bases are heavily defended against incursions, and are the centers of magical research by the South African government. Despite the provisions of anti-apartheid that were written into the Antarctic Treaty, all publicly known South African mages to date have been of Caucasian descent. Even in the paranoid Antarctic, South Africa is seen as unusually isolationist.

Utopian Territory

A multi-ethnic utopian band calling itself the Human Liberation Front during the British-Argentine conflict of the 1980's seized the former British territory of Shag rocks. Extensive use of stone-shaping magicks has greatly expanded the original islands, which were simply a series of desolate rock outcroppings. When it was revealed, in 1996, that the leader of the movement, and President for life of Utopia Island was Richard Byrd, the result was massive public outcry. Byrd's views on retaking Antarctica were well known, and it was widely believed that he might foolishly trigger a war between the Killer Penguins and humanity. So far, however, he seems content to wait and gather his strengths. No one doubts that he has a plan, but so far, no one knows what it is.

Disputed Territories

Argentina, Chile and Britain all lay claim to the South Shetland Islands, just off the Antarctic Peninsula. Already overcrowded, the islands have been the site of fierce guerilla warfare between Argentina and Chile ever since the Falklands War of 1982. Although Argentina holds more territory than Chile, the Chileans are a long way from being defeated. With the aid of their Uruguayan allies (and the more covert assistance of both Brazil and the United Kingdom), the Chilean forces are planning a major counter-offensive for next summer.

In addition, the westernmost island of the chain is the home to bases belonging to the Soviet Union and China. Thus far, the island has been left alone by the battling South American nations, but inevitably, one or both of the two bases will become involved in the war, complicating an already volatile situation.

Penguin Politics

Although it is generally accepted that the Killer Penguins share a hive-mind, it is somewhat less well-known that the

hive-mind is not a single monolithic consciousness. Each of the seven species of penguin present in Antarctica has a separate hive-mind -- but these are all psi-linked, and tend to act as one. There is an internal politics among the hive-mind, largely aligning into two factions. The Chinstrap and Adelie Penguins form one faction, while the King and Emperor Penguins are the other. The Rockhoppers are usually neutral in these internal conflicts, leaving the balance of power lying with the Macaroni and Gentoo Penguins. In practice, this means that most decisions will be made by the Macaroni Penguin consciousness, the most magically powerful of the seven. GM's may choose to individualize the seven species -- details may be found below. Each description mentions only the differences from the standard Killer Penguin template on p. T65-66.

Adelie Penguin

120 points

Absolute Direction, and 2 levels of Temperature Tolerance. It is possible that the Adelie Penguins -- who are physically more numerous and more powerful than the Chinstrap Penguins who dominate them, possess a Hive Mentality. If so, lower racial point cost by 20 points.

Chinstrap Penguin

103 points

Chinstrap Penguins are notoriously the most aggressive of all the Penguin breeds. They all gain Combat Reflexes, but suffer from Bad Temper and Bloodlust. They also gain a -2 reaction from other Penguins as a result. (large group, all the time).

Emperor Penguin

172 points

The largest of the Antarctic penguins, Emperor Penguins gain +1 to both ST and HT. In addition, they have five levels of Extra Fatigue, Night Vision, Oxygen Storage and one level of Pressure Support.

Gentoo Penguin

123 points

The smallest of the Killer Penguins, Gentoo have one level of Super Swimming, but lose one level of ST. They are also less dependent on Mana than other Killer Penguins -- reduce the frequency of its requirement to Daily.

Macaroni Penguin

136 points

The Macaroni Penguins are the most magically talented of all the Penguins. They have +1 to IQ and Magery 3 and receive Weird Magic +1 as a racially-learned skill. They also suffer from two levels of Magic Susceptibility and the disadvantage of Edgy. In addition, their yellow feathers are well-known to humans and Penguins alike as potent mana organs.

King Penguin

137 points

Almost identical to Emperor Penguins, King Penguins also gain +1 to HT. In addition, they also have three levels of Extra Fatigue and Night Vision. Suffering from something of an inferiority complex, the King Penguins compensate with Extreme Fanaticism.

Rockhopper Penguin

119 points

The best swimmers, and the most independent of all the species. Rockhoppers gain a Racial Bonus of +2 to Swimming skill, and do not have the Fanaticism that characterizes other Penguins. They are still largely hostile to humans, but would be the most willing of the species to break from the Mindsharing commune. Their access to the Mindshare is limited to Racial Memory, at a range of touch only.

Roleplaying in the Antarctic

It's very easy to just portray Antarctica as a very cold, very lonely place. To do so is to miss much of the potential of the frozen continent. Antarctica is almost completely untouched by human beings -- even the few settlements that were ever made have been largely reclaimed by the elements. Antarctica is a land of strange and eerie beauty, particularly in the vicinity of the Zhukov Firestorm.

Be sure to play up the featurelessness of the all-white surrounds, the extreme cold and constant howling of the wind. The fear that killer Penguins could be hiding anywhere -- even in plain sight -- should be played on. Antarctica is almost physically unbearable, and the experience of visiting there should be almost that to the characters. At the same time, Antarctic sunsets are unlike those anywhere else in the world (excepting the Arctic, of course), and the aurora Australis appears to be almost a living thing as it writhes and undulates. The beauty of the place is undeniable and you should try to communicate this mixture of extraordinary splendor and unparalleled danger to the players as much as possible.

Adventure Seeds

A Ridge Too Far: a plane carrying dignitaries or other important people has gone down somewhere in the Antarctic, and the PC's are given the mission of recovering it. This will require an overland trek to the crash site, evading both Killer Penguins and hostile governments, and then a wait for rescue once the magical beacon is lit. Of course, the rescuers aren't the only ones who can see the beacon -- the characters could easily find themselves besieged by the Killer Penguins.

Birds of a Feather: A team of magic-using infiltrators is sent to Antarctica to study and report on factions within the Penguin Hivemind. This will require shape-shifting magicks and a very unusual undercover role. And assuming the mission succeeds, the characters will probably be sent back the following summer to foment discord and distrust among the penguins.

We're off to see the Wizard: whatever faction the characters represent has need of the services of Richard Byrd -- but approaching him isn't easy. This is basically a dungeon-crawl, *Technomancer*-style. Byrd's island is large and well-defended, and he has a corps of fanatically loyal followers. And if the PC's get past all of that, they still have to get him to agree to help.

Ice-Cold Fusion: the Killer Penguins have located the secret necronium reactor in an abandoned base. While the political fallout back home is dealt with, the other Antarctic Treaty nations put together a multinational expeditionary force to get to the site and magically render it safe before the Killer Penguins either blow it up, or worse still, figure out how to use it. Tensions between different nation's representatives will make this even more difficult to resolve -- and does any nation involved *not* have a hidden agenda? Alternately, this could be run with the PC's being one of several competing national teams, a la Matt Reilly's "Ice Station."

The Big Cold One: this is it! The Pentagon has decided to reclaim Antarctica. Naturally, the information has leaked out, and now everyone's trying to get in on the act. As well as American (and allied NATO) forces, the Argentinesans, the Australasians, the Chinese, the Russians and the South Africans are all mounting their own assaults. Chile is ominously silent on the matter, and the Human Liberation Front is threatening to fight against anyone who sets foot on their island. No one's heard from Byrd yet, but he's certain to get involved in this at some point, although on whose side is another matter entirely. And is there any real chance that the Killer Penguins will take this lying down?

Timeline of Events

- 1945** The Trinity Event. Magic begins to work.
- 1947** Australia builds research base on Heard Island. South Africa builds base on Prince Edward Island.
- 1948** Australia builds research base on Macquarie Island.
- 1949** Soviet nuclear bomb test in Antarctica produces second Hellstorm. Following this event, the South African government is quick to build its first Antarctic base.
- 1950** United Kingdom builds base on Gough Island. China and Japan build Antarctic bases. Other governments expand pre-existing bases in the wake of the Zhukov Event.
- 1952** The first mutant penguins are captured and experimented upon by Soviet scientists. In the long run, all are dissected. South Africa builds a second Antarctic base.
- 1955** While on a mission to Antarctica, Richard Byrd's party is lost during a blizzard. Later investigations determine that the blizzard was magically created, and the Russians are blamed (wrongly) for the incident.
- 1956** The first penguins are taught Russian. To the amazement of researchers, within a week penguins all over Antarctica are speaking the language. China builds two more Antarctic bases.
- 1957** International Geophysical Year dominated by studies of Hellstorm-related phenomena, especially Antarctica Hellstorm. The Antarctica Treaty, hailed by politicians of all signatory nations as a triumph of goodwill, is seen by most non-signatory nations as a self-serving and hypocritical document.
- 1958** Vivian Fuchs-Edmund Hillary Antarctica expedition massacred by Killer Penguins.
- 1960** Over the next five years, several Antarctic bases are lost to mysteriously sudden blizzards. Although there is much finger-pointing and laying of blame between the various Antarctic nations, the true culprits are the Killer Penguins.
- 1966** Dissection experiments conclusively prove the existence of Penguin hive-mind.
- 1972** Killer Penguins observed building igloos and communities.
- 1980** South African bases overrun by unidentified forces.
- 1981** Killer Penguins attack a small Soviet base, capturing several military grimoires.
- 1982** Argentina invades and captures the Falkland Islands, and all other British Antarctic territories with the exception of Gough Island and Shag Rocks. Shag Rocks is claimed by a utopian movement and declares itself to be an independent state.
- 1983** France begins airstrip construction on offshore islands near Dumont D'Urville base, killing large numbers of wildlife, including several penguins. Argentina openly claims captured South African bases. Later that year, Killer Penguin attacks hit several French bases in retaliation. Dumont D'Urville, the only French base in the mainland, is overrun and destroyed.
- 1984** Killer penguins attack poorly defended Syowa Base (Japan). Joint effort by the ANZUS treaty nations (Australia, New Zealand and United States) evacuates base to Macdonald Island, which is abandoned to the penguins. The Japanese build "temporary" facilities under the watchful eyes of ANZUS.
- 1985** Killer penguins observed using magic; building igloos. French intelligence agents bomb the Greenpeace ship Rainbow Warrior in Auckland harbour, New Zealand. The ship sinks, but swift reacting Auckland police mages prevent loss of life.
- 1986** In the wake of the Rainbow Warrior bombing, relations between New Zealand and NATO pact countries sour. A Chilean scientific expedition captures a number of Killer Penguins and removes them to Chile for study. Much to their amazement, one of them claims to be Richard Byrd. Scrying proves the claim, and he is returned to his human form, although he is no older for his time as a Penguin.
- 1987** Australia sells Macdonald Island to Japan. Construction of a permanent Japanese base begins at once.
- 1988** Byrd finally returns to the United States, where he becomes a passionate advocate of retaking Antarctica.
- 1990** Penguins begin to attack Antarctic stations.
- 1991** The last non-Soviet human settlements are abandoned or fall to penguin attacks. Byrd drops out of the public

eye. He is believed retired by the public, but the US government is aware that he has gone underground, although not why.

- 1992** Penguins overrun Ice Station Zhukov, thus completing the conquest of Antarctica. Australia and New Zealand combine into one nation. The new Australasian Commonwealth now includes the North and South Islands of New Zealand as its seventh and eighth states.
- 1993** Norwegian base on Peter I Island falls to Killer Penguin attack.
- 1995** Penguins announce Antarctic Socialist Collective.
- 1996** Richard Byrd makes his first public appearance in years, declaring himself President for Life of Utopia Island.
- 1997** Penguin attack on Campbell Island base repelled by Australasian forces.

Further Reading

- Byrd, Richard E. *Alone*.
- Robinson, Kim Stanley. *Antarctica*.
- Rubin, Jeff. *Antarctica: A Lonely Planet Travel Survival Kit*
- King, H.R.F. *The Antarctic*
- Lovecraft, H.P. *At the Mountains of Madness*
- Reilly, Matt. *Ice Station*
- May, John. *The Greenpeace Book of Antarctica*
- Loverling, J.F. and Prescott, J.R.V. *Last of Lands . . . Antarctica*.

Appendix Z: The Space Opera Name Generator

by P.D. Magnus

One of the great charms of running a campaign in many space opera universes is that characters can have exotic, even extravagant names. This can be a challenge for the GM, however, if she freezes up when the players ask the name of some incidental NPC. It won't do to call the shady merchant in the alien bazaar by a stultifying moniker like Bob Smith.

The table below can be used for just such instances. Roll or pick a name from the table once, twice, or three times, string the results together, and you have a name. You don't even have to re-roll if you get the same name twice -- Na'am Na'am is as good a name for an alien barber as any. Almost any combination of names from the table will make a good character name.

Although the table is designed to give names with a cinematic, science fiction sound, it can be used in any campaign which allows for exotic names. A name can also be inspiration for fleshing out NPC's; when "the woman from the cantina" becomes Curia Adivan, it might suggest a woman formerly rich, now fallen on hard times.

1. Abra	26. Genera	51. Kritus	76. Quag
2. Acon	27. Gnaris	52. Kromyl	77. Quinton
3. Adivan	28. Greeg	53. Kuberra	78. Ramus
4. Ahroon	29. Gyle	54. Lana	79. Ratri
5. Bard	30. Helma	55. Livia	80. Rock
6. Bartok	31. Hergak	56. Loris	81. Rudra
7. Brell	32. Hirak	57. Lotus	82. Ryle
8. Chendra	33. Hondo	58. Mahat	83. Saldeed
9. Cord	34. Ignor	59. Marak	84. Samra
10. Curia	35. Impera	60. Mevakor	85. Seklor
11. Damme	36. Indigo	61. Mill	86. Shart
12. Del	37. Intal	62. Mino	87. Spider
13. Denaris	38. Isra	63. Na'am	88. Sprek
14. Drake	39. Jaana	64. Nagan	89. Sturm
15. Dreyfus	40. Jor	65. Naimon	90. Tel
16. Dynast	41. Jung	66. Natoth	91. Thorn
17. Endua	42. Kai	67. Needa	92. Tilad
18. Entex	43. Kalan	68. Nur	93. Ulmak
19. Espa	44. Kasur	69. Nydok	94. Ursis
20. Feris	45. Kedra	70. Orbin	95. Vazra
21. Findo	46. Kelmar	71. Orcutt	96. Wyndam
22. Finn	47. Kymnal	72. Pim	97. Yama
23. Fury	48. Kirk	73. Poole	98. Yast
24. Garand	49. Kor	74. Potak	99. Yola
25. Garm	50. Kranax	75. Praxis	100. Zokar

Pyramid Review

Weird War II: Blood on the Rhine (for d20)

Published by [Pinnacle Entertainment Group](#)

Written by John R. Hopley, with additional material from Shane Lacy Hensley and Rob Lusk

Illustrated by Chris Appel, Michael Colasante, and Richard Pollard

Edited by Shane Hensley and Jackie Unger

192 page softcover; black and white illustrations; \$25.00

Weird Wars II: Blood on the Rhine is one of the first entries in a new generation of *d20* books, one that tries to stretch the rules of *d20* into a new game that works from different set of heroic assumptions. Surprisingly, it's not the rules that trip up the product, but the limitations of marketing to *Dungeons and Dragons* fans.

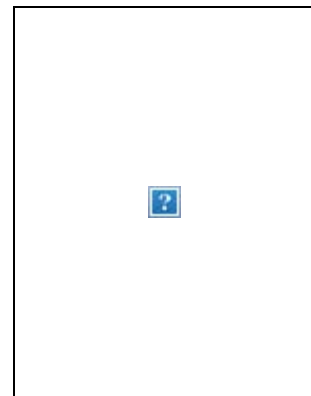
If you're familiar with Pinnacle's *Deadlands* and *Deadlands: Hell on Earth* games, you have a pretty good idea of the approach Pinnacle is taking to *Weird War II*. Pinnacle specializes in taking a historical setting, adding magic and some alternate history twists, then spicing things up with a saucy attitude. *Weird War II* follows the same approach, but with more real history and a slightly more serious tone.

The game is set in June 1944, shortly after D-Day. As far as the world and the player characters know, World War II has progressed exactly as it did in our world. (The first couple of chapters provide an excellent summary of the events and important historical figures involved in the war.) The Allies are advancing through Europe, and Hitler is throwing everything the Third Reich has into stopping them. What the world doesn't know is that "everything" includes black magic, zombie soldiers, and "wehrwolves," and that Hitler's occult minions may be just enough to turn the tide of war back in his favor.

That's an intriguing concept, but where the game shines is its translation of the *d20* system into the World War II setting. There are five basic character classes available: grunts, officers, medics, resistance fighters, and scouts. Prestige classes include commandos, snipers, and several classes of spellcasting secret agents. There are some strong similarities to the basic *D&D* character classes -- grunts are a lot like fighters, of course, and medics have more in common with clerics than anybody else -- but the classes have been adjusted to fit the game. Supernatural abilities have been stripped out of the basic classes, while skills and feats have been rewritten to fit a modern world and a military command structure.

There are a lot of good ideas and subtle touches. Rank is handled as a feat during initial character creation or when a character makes a jump from enlisted grunt to officer. This makes it easy to set up the basic divisions of private, non-commissioned officer, and officer. Once characters begin play, however, promotions are handled by making promotion rolls after successful adventures, allowing the characters to advance gradually through the ranks.

Pinnacle has also tackled one of the biggest problems facing many fantasy games in modern settings: how do you simulate the deadly effects of guns when high-level characters have so many hit points? Their solution involves several small fixes. Guns are given fairly high damage dice and good critical threat ranges. The Dead Eye feat allows characters to add their level to ranged attack damage, automatic weapons fire makes it easy to put a lot of lead in the air, and the Sniper prestige class uses coup de grace attacks to simulate deadly shots. Vehicles have armor, and



weapons have penetration values that measure their ability to cut through armor. High-level *Weird War II* characters will shrug off grazes and near-misses, but they can still be dropped by a sniper shot, and small arms fire is virtually useless against an armored vehicle.

Despite these changes -- not to mention a comprehensive equipment lists that covers every significant weapon of the European theatre after D-Day -- the rules are less complicated than you might expect. This is where one of the strengths of the *d20* system becomes noticeable. The basics of character creation and combat are handled in a sentence each (basically, "this works the same as in the *Player's Handbook*"). The book only explains what's different, freeing up 10-20 pages for the designers to fill with more world-specific material.

This ability to simply refer to other rules proves especially useful when dealing with magic. *Blood of the Rhine* uses different rules for magic than *Dungeons and Dragons*. The spellcasting classes has fewer spells available than their *D&D* counterparts, and each spell has a significant chance of failure. However, the spells themselves are all the same. The magic chapter is compressed to a few pages of rules and two charts listing exactly which spells are available to the spellcasting classes. When you consider how long the spells chapter is in the *Player's Handbook*, it becomes clear that *Blood on the Rhine* would be a 256 page book -- and more expensive -- if it were a standalone system.

Despite using many of the same spells, *Blood on the Rhine* gives its magic system a unique feel. After a couple of chilling pages about Hitler's actual obsession with the occult, the designers extend his beliefs into a rune-based system of magic. Each of the available D&D spells are connected to one or more runes from the Futhark alphabet, and knowledge of the spells is tied to knowledge of the component runes. The designers also give attention to magical Nazi artifacts, including at least one relic -- the Blood Flag -- that the historical Nazis believed had magical properties.

There are several other twists lurking in the game, from "Nazi orcs" to that staple of spooky war stories, the haunted vehicle that can guide and protect the soldiers within it. The fantasy elements of the game only occupy about 30 pages of the book, though, and that poses an unusual problem: there isn't that much weirdness in *Weird Wars II*.

The basic character classes are all ordinary soldiers, and much of the book focuses on historical weapons and equipment. Unlike *Deadlands*, the timeline is not alternate history -- it's barely secret history, since the only thing that's really different is that the Nazis' kooky occultism works. So what we have here is a robust set of *d20* rules for World War II roleplaying with a fantasy element tacked on. The fantasy is interesting, but (with the exception of the haunted vehicles, which are unusual and fun) there's nothing here that's more interesting than a straight-up historical game would be.

It's hard to shake the feeling that the Weird part of *Weird Wars II* is there simply to give the *Dungeons and Dragons* players a reason to buy the product. If so, that suggests an uncomfortable future for *d20*. One thing this product proves is that the *d20* engine is robust enough to be adapted to a very different setting -- but if every new setting has to have magic and orcs troweled onto it, what's the point?

-- Chris Aylott

Pyramid Review

Archangel RPG

Written by David Baxter

187 pages; \$18.00 as book, or \$10 as CD-ROM

Archangel: The Story of God and His Angels, written by David Baxter for Visionary Games, is a Christian roleplaying game set during the fictional "prophet war." It is a secret war, occurring in a 400-year window of time in which, according to the author, the Bible remains silent. God has empowered both angels and human prophets with powers to fight the fallen angels and their followers, until the coming of the Messiah.

It is obvious that the author has carefully researched the source material, especially the history and culture of the time. While his additions to history are imaginative, and intriguing, they are well grounded in history. The religious elements are as carefully designed, and in keeping with events chronicled in the Bible. As a Christian myself, I found nothing to offend me, and was pleased with the respect that the author handled the material.

A short story starts the book, and serves to introduce the reader to the setting. It reads just like a retelling of the climax of an adventure, but without the game mechanics. It is useful in explaining, by example, what the players can expect from the game.

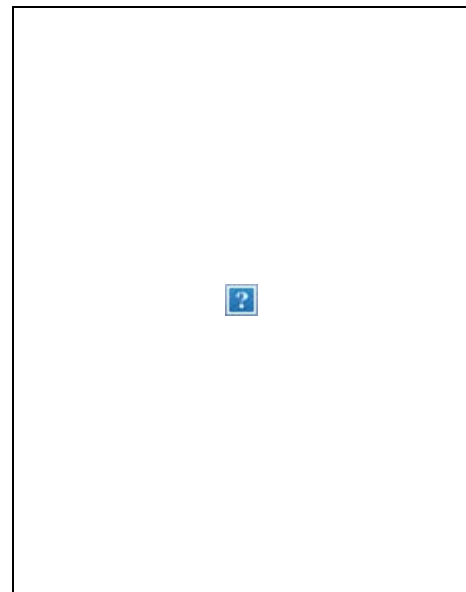
Following the story is 11 pages of history and culture, including a map of the area and a list of languages. After that follows a description of the various types of supernatural beings and the various types of human characters, in a plain English, no game statistics way. Again, the author is wisely easing the reader into the game setting, letting the flavor of the world sink in before presenting the rules.

Most of the rest of the book is composed of the rules to the game, starting with Character Creation. It is a class-based system, and only believers and skeptics have classes defined, ruling out evil characters. The character classes supplied are:

- **Champion Angel:** "A Holy Warrior For God."
- **Avenging Angel:** Not built for combat, but able to, if necessary, carry out God's will directly, whether it be blessing, or vengeance.
- **Prophet:** a travelling spokesman for God, with the ability to channel God's Power at great personal cost.
- **Apostles:** lead by example, and while they are blessed with considerable power, they must live their lives following a strict code.
- **Believers:** rely on their skills and abilities, because they don't have any powers. Believers are allowed higher starting skills as a result, and are of interest to both sides of the Prophet War, as both sides get power from their followers.

Skeptics are the treasures that both sides are fighting over. They rely completely on themselves (while even Believers have their Faith) and their skills. They, as a character class, offer the most opportunity for character growth and roleplaying depth. They can, according to the book, remain in denial about many supernatural actions, but once a Skeptic sees a Prophet call upon God's Power, he will have seen something he cannot deny. This can be a very dramatic moment, especially if the players are willing to roleplay the scene completely.

The rules system is fairly detailed, requiring charts not only for character creation, but also for combat. In fact, the last 14 pages of the book (except for the character sheet) are reference tables. The only dice needed are 2 ten sided dice,



and a 20 sided die. While the system is certainly not rules light, as is popular, it certainly is not another Rolemaster, and has fewer rules to learn than the *d20* system.

Completing the book is an example adventure session, with all the rules uses included for example. This section illuminates the previous rules section masterfully, and at 11 pages, doesn't seem to miss many of the rules. I would love to see more core rules systems provide a section like this.

The only place the book struggles is in presentation. The Table of Contents starts to go wrong at Creating a Character - p. 48 (actually page 47), and by its end places the character sheet on p. 195, 8 pages after the end of the book. The index suffers from many errors also. There are two paragraphs printed twice on page 25. The art is excellent, and does as much as the examples and the story does to get the feeling of the setting across. The layout, while simple compared to today's standards, works well, and looks quite professional.

Archangel is a clever idea, developed with skill and passion by someone who believes in it on many levels. The book appears to be a first attempt by Visionary Games at a roleplaying game, and it excels, especially at its cost. If you are a Christian or just like the idea of Angels fighting Demons in the ultimate version of Good versus Evil this is for you. If you have an adverse reaction to Christianity or evangelism this book is certainly not for you, as the writer states up front that he hopes that his book creates interest in the Bible. The setting has Christianity as its main theme, and is mildly evangelistic in places. As a Christian as well as a reviewer, I see it as the most credible entry in the Christian RPG category, and await follow-up material.

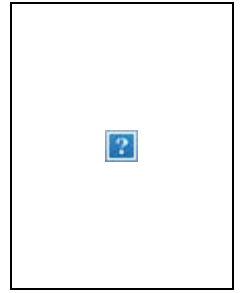
--*Shawn Lockard*

Black Death

Published by [BTRC](#)

Written by Greg Porter

\$9.95



There are few board games whose subject is disease. Death, destruction and willful mayhem at a variety of different scales, yes. Disease itself -- no. Which is all perfectly fine, because a game about disease would be really rather sick, would it not? But if I were to tell you that Greg Porter -- the creator of *Black Death* the game in which, ". . . Your friends can play the exciting role of bubonic plague, typhoid, cholera or any real or imagined disease of your choosing in a fun-filled attempt to depopulate 14th Century Europe!" -- also wrote *Macho Women With Guns*, then I doubt that you would be surprised. Of course, there have been other disease-themed games, such as B&B's *Plague* -- set in the English seaside town of Weymouth at the time of the 1348 outbreak of the bubonic plague, but of course, you do not get to be that disease!

Black Death is a little game, but played on a big scale. The format is just like a *Dungeons & Dragons* scenario, with the map on the inside of a stiff card cover. Inside are four pages of rules, the counters on thin card, twenty event cards, and a range of new-city templates. Using these, *Black Death* can be updated from the 1348 outbreak of the bubonic plague to the 1665 outbreak for a bonus game. A single six-sided die is required to play, but is not supplied, as the provided components all fit into an A4-sized plastic envelope.

The game begins with each player determining the virulence and mortality ratings for their disease. These must add up to six, but ratings of one in either factor are not recommended. The disease should then be named and described. A variety of real diseases are rated, from the humble syphilis to the decidedly deadly pneumonic plague, but describing your own probably requires a decidedly perverse imagination! Then they get to choose from the range of vibrantly coloured counters to represent their malady.

They also draw a single card from the small deck. These simulate a historical event or condition that can affect play. This can be Bad Weather! which reduces movement, Smugglers! which makes getting your disease into a region far easier and Mutation! which can be played to alter the virulence or mortality rating of a disease by a step of one point. All of the cards are fully explained on the back of the rules sheet and more cards are received after a disease has wiped out first ten and then twenty million people. Finally before actual play begins, two disease counters are put down by each player on the Eastern and Southern edges of the board as their miasma's point of entry into Europe.

Play takes place across a map of Europe, the Near East, and North Africa (Tunis); the most Westerly point is Reykjavik, and Stockholm and Helsinki in the North. Cities and regions are depicted as boxes, with major ones such as Paris or Constantinople, having their greater populations represented with more than one box. There can be only one disease counter in a single box. Traditional routes of communication and travel between various cities are represented as straight lines. Less traveled or more difficult routes are a hindrance to the transmission of a disease and these are marked with a minus number. Diseases begin on the Southern and Eastern edges of the board, ready to follow a route in from either Asia or Africa.

Each turn consists of several phases. Turn order changes every round, but is determined by a die roll on the first turn. Subsequently, players go in order of ascending body count achieved so far. On their turn, a player rolls one die to determine the number of chances their disease has to infect and another for movement points. To infect a region, which must be an adjacent box within a city or linked to another city via a communication line, a roll must be made under the disease's virulence factor. Travel penalties, slums, and temperature also alter the virulence factor for this roll, as will attempting to infect another disease. Since only one counter can occupy each box, movement can be difficult, but is eased by being able to move any counter, including those of other players. That said, a counter can be only

moved one box per player phase and must also pay the extra cost of the poor travel routes. The mortality phase involves rolling on the DRT, or "Death Results Table." The roll is compared against the mortality rating of the disease to obtain a fraction, which is the number of counters removed from the map. The disease's body count goes up by the amount. The result might also be a catastrophic kill, which destroys one region if a city has more than one box, removing it from play; or it might be "cure" in which case there are no kills and a sixth of their counters are removed from the map.

Victory is achieved through gaining a certain body count, which lowers as the number of players involved (up to a maximum of six) increases. It is not really effective as a two-player game, with four or more being better. Pleasingly, there are the historical references throughout the rules, explaining in particular the reasoning behind the event cards. Although it is probably too fiddly for "beer and pretzels," *Black Death* is a fun game, though let down by the slightly flimsy components.

--*Matthew Pook*

Dork Tower!



Dork Tower!



Murphy's Rules



by John Kovalic

Murphy's Rules



Murphy's Rules



It's All About the Benjamins

"[F]ew in public affairs act from a mere view of the good of their country, whatever they may pretend; and, tho' their actings bring real good to their country, yet men primarily considered that their own and their country's interest was united, and did not act from a principle of benevolence."

-- Benjamin Franklin, *Autobiography*

Every great nation boasts a wizard at its founding. Israel has King Solomon, Britain has Merlin the Wise, Egypt has Imhotep. For Americans, Ben Franklin has always been our founding wizard -- Renaissance man for an Enlightenment nation, scientist, publisher, statesman, comedian, inventor, and sage. Protean and Promethean, Benjamin Franklin exemplifies change, progress, and technology like a proper Hermetic deity should. However, wizards live on the boundaries; their shapeshifting souls reach back to the dread in the dark even if (perhaps especially if) they snatch lightning from heaven. So cast Poor Richard's runes with me, and let's bisociate the bifocaled conspirator on the hundred-dollar bill.

"I have look'd near, long, and narrowly at a person who has been, and is, the Father of all this shameful business. Neither my reading, experience, nor imagination can furnish me with the Idea of a mind more corrupt, nor that labors with more cunning, and systematic constancy to carry that depravity into execution [H]e who is the father and prompter of all this business will not hesitate at the utmost extremity of wickedness, to spread and maintain that corruption by which alone his influence and objects can be long supported."

-- letter of Arthur Lee to Sam Adams (May 22 1779)

To begin with, there's one school of thought which holds that Franklin really belongs on the hundred-pound note instead. Could Benjamin Franklin have actually been a British "mole" or double agent? In *Code Number 72: Ben Franklin: Patriot or Spy?* USF history professor Cecil B. Currey sets forth a strong circumstantial case against Ben Franklin, revealing him as (at the least) a shady operator with many illicit ties to George III's government throughout the Revolutionary period. While colonial agent in London, Franklin served as the linchpin of a series of land-speculation deals involving almost the entire British cabinet. One of his partners, Edward Bancroft, became Franklin's confidential secretary in Paris -- and a double agent for the British spymaster William Eden. Other American embassy staff members on the British payroll included their official courier, Joseph Hynson, fellow-ambassador (and eventual traitor himself) Silas Deane's secretary William Carmichael, fellow-ambassador Arthur Lee's secretary John Thornton, and another of Franklin's speculator friends, Samuel Wharton.

Throughout the entire period of the war, Franklin defended all of these men from accusations (primarily from Lee) of their divided allegiance, and consorted with the British intelligence service's chief of station in Paris, one Paul Wentworth (another land speculator). Franklin even went so far as to accuse Lee of paranoia, and referring in letters and conversation to Lee's "descent into insanity." Franklin's "gaslighting" of Lee eventually succeeded, and Lee did, in fact, become famously bitter and paranoid, suspicious of old friend and Franklin foe alike.

"Like you, Sir, I am one of those men who cannot be kept down without risk; those who, because they have done great things, wield shame as powerful men wield authority. Whatever others may try, Sir, I can, like you, call upon the world to judge; and although the good I have done may be forgotten, and that I wish to do prevented, I shall have posterity to avenge me."

-- letter of Franz Anton Mesmer to Benjamin Franklin (Aug. 20 1784)

This mastery of psychological warfare masked as political infighting is only to be expected from America's foremost observer of the human condition -- and its foremost expert on mesmeric science. Franklin served on the investigating committee that debunked Mesmer's "animal magnetism" for the French Academy -- despite having designed some of Mesmer's equipment for him, and being a Masonic lodge brother to the Austrian illuminist. (Franklin also became Grand Master of the Illuminated Order of the Nine Sisters in 1779, after having been Grand Master of Pennsylvania Freemasonry since 1734.) Franklin's designs can also be seen in the [Influencing Engine](#), and the madman Matthews even identified one of Franklin's speculation partners (and another of Eden's agents), Sir William Pulteney as part of the Air-Loom Conspiracy. Between Mesmer's experiments on hypnosis, and Franklin's own work with electrical

stimulation of the brain, could the Philadelphia genius have developed a primitive mind-control device, and used it to drive Lee crazy?

"[T]he exquisite sense of classical design, charmingly reproduced by the Lord Le Despenser at West Wycombe, whimsical and puzzling as it may sometimes be in its imagery, is as evident below the earth as above it."

-- Benjamin Franklin, letter of 1773

Or did he rely on the older methods of mind-control and insanity, harnessed by the ancient [cults of Dionysos](#), as restored in the "Order of Friars of St. Francis of Medmenham," better known as the Hell-Fire Club? The Hell-Fire Club alternated infiltrating much of British political life with meeting in underground grottos for orgies and decadent revelry of all kinds. And Franklin had been a member of this group, it seems likely, since 1772, when he first stayed as a house-guest with its founder Sir Francis Dashwood, the Baron Le Despenser. Dashwood was a rich young nobleman, a prominent anti-Catholic (and later anti-religious) writer, a legendary rake, and a Druid after the fashion of Stonehenge excavator William Stukeley. Dashwood, to tie a few more strands together, was also a fellow-Mason, and as Postmaster-General of England (and thus in a position to intercept and read mail), responsible for internal espionage. An interesting 1778 diary entry by one John Norris seems to indicate that Franklin and Dashwood communicated with each other by coded heliograph messages -- whether as fellow Dionysiac cultists or as spy and spymaster remaining delightfully vague. Dashwood painted scenes of Dionysos and Ariadne on the ceiling of his house at West Wycombe, and built one wing as an exact duplicate of a temple to Bacchus.

"Get what you can, and what you get hold; 'tis the Stone that will turn all your lead into gold,' as Poor Richard says. And when you have the Philosopher's Stone sure you will no longer complain of Bad Times, or The Difficulty of paying Taxes."

-- Benjamin Franklin, *The Way to Wealth*

Dashwood also invested in Franklin's land schemes, which mostly centered around a stretch of land in western Pennsylvania, eastern Kentucky, and modern West Virginia that the investors called "Vandalia." This stretch, perhaps not coincidentally, is also one of the most heavily UFO- and [ultraterrestrial](#)-infested regions of America, from the West Virginia Mothman to the Hopkinsville, Kentucky goblins. The area of western Pennsylvania that Franklin's (treasonous? Masonic? Dionysian?) combine had their eye on had long been home to the Moravian Brotherhood of Ephrata, a mystical Rosicrucian group founded by the kabbalistic scholar Christian Knorr von Rosenroth. (Meanwhile, Dashwood reportedly founded his Order under the glow of 'an everlasting Rosicrucian lamp.' A primitive electric light?)

Did the geomantic Druid eye of Francis Dashwood, and the electromagnetic Leyden-jars of Benjamin Franklin, sense the same thing the kabbalistic Moravians did about the western Alleghenies? Another conclave of Rosicrucians, the Chapter of Perfection under Johannes Kelpius, settled in 1694 on Wissahickon Creek, now part of Philadelphia's Fairmount Park (and the site of a March 30, 1999, UFO sighting). Two of the leading Perfectionists, Conrad Beissel and Michael Wohlfarth, befriended the youthful Franklin when he moved to Philadelphia from Boston in 1725. In Massachusetts, Franklin might have met the American alchemists Samuel Danforth (who, in 1773, wrote to offer Franklin a piece of the Philosopher's Stone), or laid the foundation for later work with the alchemically-minded president of Yale, Ezra Stiles. Could Franklin's famous kite and lightning (in Wissahickon Creek, perhaps?) have covered up a far more significant [Philadelphia Experiment](#) in 1752? Could Franklin's work with geomantic sorcery and Rosicrucian alchemy have driven him to plot a revolution in America, paving the way for a Masonic Republic? Could Franklin have played a dangerous triple game, serving not only America and Britain but the ancient cause of [Arcadian occult empire?](#)

"Workmen have dug up the remains of ten bodies hidden beneath the former London home of Benjamin Franklin, the founding father of American independence. The remains of four adults and six children were discovered during the £1.9 million restoration of Franklin's home at 36 Craven Street, close to Trafalgar Square. Researchers believe that there could be more bodies buried beneath the basement kitchens. Initial estimates are that the bones are about 200 years old and were buried at the time Franklin was living in the house, which was his home from 1757 to 1762, and from 1764 to 1775."

-- London *Sunday Times*, Feb 11, 1998

Or could Franklin have had a still deeper secret, beneath even the (Satanic?) rites of "St. Francis." In 1998, while restoring Franklin's London house, workmen uncovered ten sets of human bones, all showing signs of knife and saw marks, and at least one [trepanned skull](#) (more mind-control residue?). The coroner eventually decided that the bones had been cadavers for medical experiments and teaching (the husband of Franklin's mistress was a surgeon) which means that Franklin, at the very least, connived at grave-robbing. Given the electrical experiments and grave-robbing, could Johann Dippel (the erstwhile [Baron Frankenstein](#)) be far behind? Could he have somehow "body-jumped" into the eerily-similar Ben *Franklin* during his death -- and Franklin's Masonic ascension in 1734? Or, given how much of Franklin's early life we primarily know from his own *Autobiography*, "Franklin" may even have been a cover identity for the mysterious "Cosmopolitan" who appeared to 17th-century American alchemist George Starkey -- Franklin was certainly a cosmopolitan, and one at home with cover identities from "Poor Richard" to "Isaac Bickerstaff" to "Moses" to (perhaps) "Agent No. 72." The bodies might then be alchemical raw materials, perhaps the "blood of innocents" needed for the ["red mercury"](#) of Eudoxus.

Or perhaps they were lunch. Franklin went to England in 1757. He spent almost the entire rest of his life abroad, and even the ten widely-spaced years he spent back in America were full of travel, dislocation, and (perhaps-convenient) illness. In some important ways, he ceased to be an American after 1757 -- perhaps he ceased to be human, too. Both Bancroft and Wentworth had interests in the Reptoid-haunted [jungles of Guiana](#) (where Bancroft had done much travel and naturalist research), as well as the ultraterrestrial nexi of Pennsylvania. On the trip to London, Franklin busied himself charting the Gulf Stream, leaning out over the side of the ship at night as it passed through the Bermuda Triangle. Could something have made the substitution there, of a rakehell and orgiast for "Poor Richard"; of a corrupt ambassador for the man who wrote that "honesty is the best policy," of a Reptoid conspirator-magus for America's greatest scientist? Benjamin Franklin's papers, conveniently, have largely vanished -- and the British government attempted, in 1807, to prevent the publication of the remainder. Perhaps somewhere in a cave in western Pennsylvania, or in a hidden shrine to Rosicrucian Bacchus, or in the secret archives of the Royal Society, there's a copy of the *Poor Reptoid's Almanack* that will sort it all out. Or maybe the truth has vanished, after all, like a flash of lightning.

Fiddly Bits: The Legend Reborn

Yes, it's time for the column-subject you love to give 2s to! **Odds 'n' ends!**

* * *

In my column ["Do Or Do Not: Um, I've Only Plotted For 'Do'"](#) a few weeks ago, I described what can go wrong when you only plan for one course of action the characters can take.

One of our readers, Gabriel, sent me this anecdote:

Here's an annoying story of one game I once GMed.

It had started off as your typical set of *AD&D* dungeon crawl adventures, and was progressing quite well.

Until someone lent me a *Spelljammer* box set which I decide to set into the campaign.

So, I created a simple dungeon that went:

- Enter
- Kill some monsters
- Get spelljamming star ship
- Explore universe etc.

And this would have been fine except that when the party saw the ship, they decide to set fire to it to drive out any monsters that might be onboard.

This was something I was not prepared for.

I never played *Spelljammer* again.

Ever.

This is one of the funniest stories I'd ever heard.

To paraphrase *Clerks*, "This game would be great if it weren't for the players."

* * *

I've been slogging through many of the fiddly parts of *Pyramid* over the past week (trying to burn off lots of nervous energy). So my email inbox has gone from about 400 to 40 currently. The slushpile has been about 90% read and decided on; now I just need to write lots and lots of letters (both acceptance and rejection). Hopefully I'll get a chance to do that soon. Thanks for your patience, all.

* * *

For would-be contributors, I would ask that you submit any other questions you may have in a separate email. I've been getting a fair number of articles that have other questions tucked in the beginning (inquiring about other articles' status, query letters, or payment issues). Please don't; often I don't even *look* at an article before moving it to a slushpile, so any pressing questions you might have wouldn't be read for possibly several weeks.

* * *

As reminders to contributors:

- Please don't send an article as an attachment if at all possible. I may well eventually decide that I'll automatically reject any articles submitted as attachments. I won't, currently, but it doesn't make my life any easier. If there's a reason you need to send something as an attachment, you may want to drop me a line first. I'm not an ogre!
- I *have* started rejecting submissions that come as multiple articles in one email. These literally gum up the entire system; I do all my sorting work in my email program, moving article emails from Slushpile to Temp Accepted to Accepted to 010921 (or whatever that week's folder name is) to Paid, all as appropriate. Now, if I have an email with three articles all in one, I'm stuck. I can't divide the submissions; I have a hard time keeping track of what's been accepted, rejected, used, and paid. And in general it's bad. So if you have four submissions, please send me four emails.
- If you're a review writer, please contribute all the information that's in a standard review at the top. Book name, publisher, writer, illustrator and editor if you'd like, and book size (number of pages) and cost. (If you want to be really nice to me, putting the publisher's website somewhere is great, too.) That'll save me the trouble of needing to track it down. As much as I try, I don't own *every* book that's out there!
- **Please** include all contact information with your submission. If I accept your article, but you don't include how I can pay you, that will (obviously) slow down your compensation greatly.

* * *

I've gotten a couple of queries from would-be contributors about what we're looking for. I never like to answer that question, since if I say I'm looking for *Foo: The Bar* support, I'm afraid I'll get 10 mediocre *Foo: The Bar* articles (which I'll reject) instead of 10 good non-*Foo: The Bar* articles (which I might well accept).

Having said that, I'd point out that we're *very* low (read: none) on pretty much all features, except for Supporting Cast. So if you have any Warehouse 23, Terra Incognita, or the like, feel free to contribute.

I'd also point out that I'm declaring Appendix Z officially open for submissions. Appendix Z is a forum for short (ideally 1000 words or less), generic features that might be of interest to (ideally) multiple games.

Finally, I have a real dearth of science fiction submissions. So if you have anything neat in that genre, you may want to send it along.

* * *

For the original rant, see my column last year around this time (["Kibbles & Bits"](#)). But, in a nutshell, *please please pretty please call me "Steven."*

Any variation on "Steven" *really* bugs me . . . and when over half of my email has been wrong lately, I know it's time to remind folks.

Thanks!

* * *

And, as ever, if you want to share your thoughts on *Pyramid* (or anything else, really), feel free to contact me. I'm probably fastest to contact on the chat rooms (I'm there most evenings after 4 PM EST), but I always read the [sjgames.pyramid](#) discussion group, and my [email](#).

(Oh, and wish me luck! I'm starting my first gaming session in nine months on Saturday! Hopefully it's something you don't forget, like falling off a bike . . .)

--Steven Marsh

* * *

Answer from two weeks ago: Knight of the Living Dead book from TSR's Catacomb series

(Two stars) "Jackalope: Small, fierce rabbit with antler. May attack in mating season. Mostly harmless, unless undead."

Plato in the Middle Ages

For Ars Magica

Jeremiah Genest & Adam Bank

To understand the great teachings of Socrates' apprentice and why we as magi must look to him in all things, we must first understand how Plato himself came to knowledge. Just three years into Plato's apprenticeship, Plato witnessed the execution of his master, the wisest of men, who willingly drank hemlock when commanded to-however unjustly-by the august body to which he pledged unending loyalty, the courts of the people of Athens.

Who killed Plato's master, the one we call Socrates? The court of Athens handed him a death sentence. His supposed crime? The corruption of youth and the denouncing of religion. This Bishopric now levels these same charges against me for taking you away from your vulgar parents. (No amount of noble blood can purge the vulgarity I speak of, boy!) I am as innocent of these crimes as Socrates. I follow humbly in his footsteps, celebrating God. That blustering bishop would be served well by the lesson of Socrates' execution, if not for the deluding lies of the Church.

At his trial, Socrates declared, "I believe in my familiar spirit, how much more then must I believe in the gods, who are the great spirits of the universe? I believe more in God than do any of my accusers." Many years hence, you shall declaim the same. The sages of Socrates' time believed in a Divine that permeated all nature, in the Invisible that governed the Visible. This bound philosophy to religion, magic to worship, because pagan high priest and philosopher held the same truths sacred, and followed the same mysteries. Today, churchmen say Socrates deserved his punishment, and magi should be treated likewise. As you learn, this legacy of misunderstanding will pass to you.

Imagine the serene spectacle, and how it nested in Plato's heart as the most beautiful and holy mystery, his first great initiation: Socrates, dying for the sake of truth, spending his last hour of life conversing with his apprentices about the immortality of the soul. Later in life, Plato mastered all the sciences and philosophies, but he ever remained the filius of Socrates. When Plato penned his Dialogues, he attributed the treasures of his own thoughts to the mouth of his master.

Plato received from Socrates the great impulse, the active male principle of his life, his faith in justice and truth. This impulse drove Plato to travel the world in pursuit of the mysteries, of the sources of Socrates' own wisdom. In Egypt he trained under the wizard-priests of that land, the ancestors of our Order, and achieved the third stage of the initiation of Isis, conferring upon him perfect intellectual clarity and dominion of the intellect over soul and body.

There he learned of Pythagoras, pater of Socrates, greatest sage and magus of Greece, who in his time achieved the highest stage of Isis' initiation, a direct vision of divine truth, and with it the power to work his will upon the Earth. (Our esteemed brethren of the House of Bonisagus hold that Pythagoras was thus the first of our lineage to fully awaken the Gift). Plato journeyed to Italy to join the circle of Pythagoreans there. He paid an enormous price for one of the master's manuscripts. From all these sources sprang Plato's own wisdom, corpus of teachings, and magic.

On returning to Athens, Plato founded his school, and named it the Academy. While dedicated to Socrates' goal of spreading Truth, he could not openly teach that which the priests of Egypt and the Pythagoreans conspired to conceal. Thus we can find the mysteries within the Dialogues, dissembled and ciphered, written as legends, myths, and parables. With the Dialogues, Plato furtively taught mystery to the youths of Athens (Aristotle among them), who otherwise drowned in the superficial artistry of the sophists and the empty rhetoric of the orators-both of which, alas, remain with us today in the guise of the solicitor.

The mysteries are easily found in the Dialogues by those with the mind to look. The Theory of Forms correlates to Pythagoras' sacred numerology. The mystery of the migration and evolution of the Soul suffuses Plato's entire corpus, though nowhere does it appear so clearly as in the *Phaedo*, and in the Legend of Er in the last book of the *Republic*. In Plato's hands the Sacred Tetrad, the source of Pythagorean magic, took on the guise of the Good, the Beautiful, and the

True.

In every Dialogue, Plato seeks to answer the most important question ever asked: "How do you live a good life?" Plato's thoughts resound with concerns of ethics, moral wisdom, and values. Platonists do not pursue knowledge for the sake of knowledge, or waste time with esoteric trivia. Plato's works contain an urgency and immediate application absent from the teachings of Aristotle and House Bonisagus, Aristotle's greatest proponents in our Order. No wonder, then, why many members of the House Guernicus hunt and devour any work of Plato they can find in their search for law to guide the Order.

Many of the Dialogues begin on the same path, each reflecting the all-important question of the good life. A conversant in the dialogue seeks to define some grand notion, such as virtue, justice, or tyranny, by parading before Socrates a swarm of examples. To which Socrates invariably replies, "tell me not of differing things, but speak of the one quality that unites them, that makes them examples of the notion you seek." This is the first step on the path to the Theory of Forms. In time you will learn that all we see around us are mere examples, only shadows of the Forms that bring meaning to a world in total flux.

What do I mean by a world of flux? As you learn magic, when you cast your first spells, you will learn that the sturdiest oak, the firmest earth, and even the heartiest of flesh will melt and mold at your command. All matter lies in constant flux and impermanence. The world of crude matter is false. It does not exist. Only the Forms are real, fixed and eternal. Only the Forms can be truly known; all else we ever speak is flawed opinion. I will teach you how to create, understand, control, change, and even destroy an object's connection to its Form.

You tremble? Perhaps you fear for your soul. Put all such fears aside, for neither the greatest archmage nor I can even blemish it. Plato gave us and even the Church our understanding of the immortal soul. The soul is kindred to the Forms. In time, you will use the purest element of your soul, the intellect, what some might call the Gift, to unlock the secrets of the world of Being. I will show you the Demiurge, he who binds Becoming to Being. I will teach you his language, the mystery that makes the Demiurge the servant of the Gifted.

We begin our lives with souls burdened with the weights of Becoming. You will shed your burden, by wisdom and Twilight if you succeed, or by death should you fail . . .

Commentary: Plato's Magic

"And this corporeal element, my friend, is heavy and weighty and earthy, and is that element of sight by which a soul is dragged down again into the visible world, because the soul is afraid of the invisible and of the world below-prowling about tombs and sepulchers, near which, as they tell us, are seen certain ghostly apparitions of souls which have not departed sure, but are cloyed with sight and therefore visible."

--Socrates (as attributed by Plato in the *Phaedo*)

The branch of Platonic theory prevalent in Middle Ages began in Egypt in the 2nd Century. ("Neoplatonism" is a modern label; Neoplatonists considered themselves simply Platonists.) Adopting spirituality and mysticism from the religions of the ancient Orient, these Platonists rebelled against the spread of Christianity in the Greek world, seeking to revitalize their pagan roots with new theories and practices of magic. This rivalry followed Western magicians through the millennium and into the Middle Ages, when many members the Order of Hermes take up the feud.

The Descent of the Universe from Light to Darkness

Platonic magic begins with the philosophy of idealism, the rejection of the material world for the primacy of the spirit. The soul, being an immaterial spirit, does not originate in the material world, but above it. The soul, all truth, and all magic come from the Infinite, Absolute, and One God.

Being Infinite, God exceeds all things finite, including mortal thought and understanding. This makes the study of God and magic a mystery. The language used to describe the indescribable sounds pithy and almost nonsensical to the

uninitiated. God, for example, is not a Being, or a Mind, but the Over-Being, and the Over-Mind.

Being Absolute and One, God is good, and God's goodness emanates like the light of the sun. From this light shines all of Creation in a series of steps. Each step down, or emanation, leads away from God, and the God's goodness becomes increasingly diffuse and degraded as if one stepped slowly away from a light into darkness.

The primary emanation of God is Nous (NOOS), the Intellect, called an image of God and the world of Ideas. This first step down from the One houses various archetypes of human knowledge and material things. Platonists in the Order of Hermes identify the realm of Forms with the Nous.

From Nous emanates the second step down from the One, called the World-Soul. From the World-Soul, in turn, emanates the Forces. The Forces include individual human souls, and, according to one clutch of Criamon magi, the Hermetic Techniques, making the World-Soul an as yet unexplored realm of Techniques.

Many steps lead away from the Forces of the World-Soul and eventually to Matter, the material world. This farthest step away from the light of the One does not actually exist. The material world subsists only as darkness, as the complete absence of God. Thus, devoid of God's pure light, Matter is the source of all evil. Some Flambeau magi seize upon this metaphor with frightening, occasionally distorted enthusiasm.

The Ascent of the Magician from Darkness into Light

Humanity, composed of both body and soul, shares in the light of God and the darkness of Matter. Magicians, therefore, can return to the light of God by purging the darkness of Matter from their thoughts, actions, and (upon the eventuality of death or perhaps Final Twilight), their being.

The path to God, the answer to the question of the good life, is the pursuit of knowledge and the renouncing of material-based sensation and opinions. Knowledge is a belief, grounded in logic and wisdom, concerning true things, such as Platonic Forms, God, and magic. Everything else, everything related to the material world, is godless, degraded opinion and vulgar sensation.

To take the first step up toward God, the philosopher must withdraw from the world of sensation by a process of purification. Once achieved, the philosopher can truly contemplate upon the indwelling intellect, the soul, and its source, the World-Soul. After fully understanding the inner-world, the philosopher then steps up to the study of the Nous, the outer Intellect.

To reach the final step, however, God must accept the magician. God reveals Himself by sending a special light into the soul of the chosen, allowing the philosopher to see and understand the One. The philosopher's mind enters an ecstatic, passive trance, allowing union of mortal and God. This union brings forth supreme happiness, and those who attain it are philosopher-saints, confirmed in grace.

Upon union, the philosopher becomes a spiritual being, a man of God, a prophet, and worker of wonders. The philosopher-saint commands the forces of nature and the demons of the supernatural, with a vision that extends into the past and future. For Hermetic Platonists, the Gift of the magus is that special light given to the philosopher by God.

The practical path of the magician begins with asceticism, the thinning out of the veil of matter which stands between the soul and the spiritual world. Practicing asceticism, the magician can learn to properly meditate. After mastering meditation, spiritual perfection comes from the consultation of oracles, the pursuit of divination, and ritual sacrifice to sundry higher powers of the spirit world. To the superior gods, these sacrifices are bloodless, but the lesser powers demanded blood.

The History of Neoplatonism

Plotinus (circa 205-270 AD), a native of Lycopolis in Egypt, became the first author of the Platonic revival. At the age of 28, Plotinus attended the lectures of Ammonius Saccas, a porter on the docks of Alexandria, the mysterious

revivalist of mystic Platonism who never wrote a single text. Tutor of Emperors, Plotinus studied and taught in Mesopotamia, Persia, and Rome, before retiring with his disciples to Campania in 263. There, Porphyry (circa 233-303 AD) edited Plotinus' fifty-four treatises on philosophy into six groups of nine each, collectively called the Enneads. Porphyry, after studying in Athens, came to Rome and devoted himself to Plotinus, whom he revered, along with Pythagoras, as thaumaturgoi, "wonder-workers," or powerful magicians. Porphyry wrote on the practice of magic of the soul and the defense of the old pagan ways.

Iamblichus of Syria (mid 3rd century - circa 330 AD), student of Porphyry, refined the metaphysical doctrines of Platonism, emphasizing the importance of practicing magic to achieve salvation. The One, wrote Iamblichus, itself emanates from the unknowable "Absolutely First." Plotinus' Nous contains two halves, the Intellectual and the Intelligible. Both halves are divided into triads, the super-terrestrial gods. Beneath these six gods, subordinate terrestrial gods form a huge, ordered pantheon: 360 celestial gods, 72 orders of sub-celestial gods, and 42 orders of natural gods. The demigod heroes of old, and the ancestral philosopher-saints such as Pythagoras and Plotinus, also took their place in this "modernized" Greco-Roman mythos intended to compete with the growing popularity of Christianity.

Proclus (410-485 AD), born in Constantinople, first studied Aristotelian theory in Alexandria, and around the year 430 traveled to Athens to join the Athenian school of Platonists founded by Plutarch the Great. Proclus applied Aristotelian logic to Platonic metaphysics and magical theories. Emanation, wrote Proclus, consists of three subordinate stages, the original, emergence from the original, and the return to the original. The emanations of the perfect One down to corrupt Matter form a serial chain of logical steps. Through theurgy (see *The Mysteries*, pp. 113-141), the soul of the magician traces back these steps and earns the reward of reincarnation. By the 13th century, most of Proclus' work became readily available in Latin translation.

After Proclus, however, Christianity quickly won over the Empire. In 529 AD, the age of Platonism came to an end when Emperor Justinian ordered the closing of Athens' schools of philosophy. Damascius, last leader of Plato's school, found exile in Persia, accompanied by Simplicus. The mid-6th century saw a brief return of Platonism to Alexandria through the writings of John Philoponus and Olympiodorus. Like Simplicus, however, they wrote as commentators, not originators of new ideas. With their conversion to Christianity in the late 6th century, the direct lineage of Plato died.

Plato's European Legacy

Later Christian writers found they shared much in common with Platonists when Christianity sought converts in the North and West. Pagan religions generally worship and rejoice in the natural world and spirits of nature. The Christian notions of the immortal soul, angels, and omnipotent God, on the other hand, share much of Plato's idealism. To bolster their arguments for a perfect, spiritual world superior to the natural world and its sins, many Christian theologians borrowed heavily from the well-ordered discourses of the Platonists. Ardent Christians such as Saint Augustine readily excised the magical aspects of Platonism, and their philosophies paralleled the original doctrine of Plato's Dialogues closer than Plotinus' or Proclus', but others embraced the mysticism of Plato's descendants.

Plato in the 13th Century

The West lost Plato's Dialogues as it lost the Roman Empire. After Justinian closed the Athenian schools in 529, however, a group of philosophers settled in Syria, carrying the works of Plato and Aristotle with them. The Dialogues' painful journey back to Christian Europe took six centuries, as scholars translated them into Syriac, then Arabic and Hebrew, when they re-entered through Moorish Spain in Latin translation, along with the later commentaries. At the same time, many philosophical works inspired by Proclus appeared, either written anonymously or misattributed to authors such as Aristotle.

The Timaeus appeared in Western Europe centuries before any of the other Dialogues. Chalcidius, a 4th century Christian scholar, translated the Timaeus into Latin, and authored a commentary that accompanied the Dialogue for the next thousand years. The Timaeus' discussion of the creation of the world, and Chalcidius' commentary on incorporating its metaphysics into the Christian framework, captured the imagination of many priests, philosophers,

and magicians alike.

Plato also found many indirect channels into Christian thought. The corpus of Dionysus appealed to many Christian mystics. The famed Roman orator Cicero (106-43 BC) provided another important conduit of Greek thought, translating, commentating, and composing original texts in Latin. Saint Augustine borrowed from Cicero, Plato, and the later Platonists when writing his influential works.

In the later 12th century Henricus Aristippus translated the *Phaedo* and the *Meno*, but for the most part Plato's own writings remained inaccessible to the mortal West. The Order of Hermes' far-ranging influence, however, has brought many Platonic texts into Gifted hands.

The Platonist

Platonists seek enlightenment from within. They prefer solitude, seclusion, and study. Unlike Aristotelians, Platonists favor mental exercise over physical experience and experimentation. They consider mental purity to be the goal of learning and magic. Involvement in mundane affairs or political intrigue is a waste of time better spent teaching or searching for inner understanding. Platonists believe the greatest things in life are learning, teaching, close friendship, and the carriage of true justice.

Suggested Mystae Virtues: Magical Imagination +1, Oneiromancy +2, Parhedros +2, Thaumaturgy +4, Theurgy +1

Suggested Hermetic Virtues: Affinity with (Vim) +3, Deft Art (Mentem) +1, Life-Linked Spontaneous Magic +3, Special Circumstances (while meditating) +1

Suggested General Virtues: Clear Thinker +1, Immunity (varies), Inspirational +1, Intuition +2, Mentor +2, Purifying Touch (varies), Strong Personality +1

Suggested Flaws: Blatant Gift -1, Magic Addiction -3, Noncombatant -2, Reclusive -1, Social Handicap -1, Susceptibility to Divine Power -4, Twilight Points -1, Twilight Prone -2

Suggested Abilities: Artes Liberales, Concentration, Hermetic Law, Philosophiae, Theology

Suggested Arts: Creo, Imagonem, Mentem, Vim

Suggested Spells: Theurgical spells, oneiromantic spells and divinatory spells such as Eyes of the Future (InIm 30), and Sense the Shadows of the Spheres (InVi 10)

Bjornaer: Our heartbeats are our hermitages. Let us withdraw from the mortal world, discard our human shells, and contemplate Truth in its purest form.

Bonisagus: Our House's Founder followed two great callings: theory and teaching. In the serenity of the laboratory and the covenant, away from impurity of mundane concerns, we can develop and pass on his legacy.

Criamon: The Enigma lies within the human mind. If we pursue the theory and the lore of the first mathematicians, we can enter a realm of pure thought and glimpse the Enigma that dwells there.

Ex Miscellenea: Pythagoras was the first known ascetic magician in the West. Like him, we descend from the early mad magicians, those dwellers on the fringes of society who could see the entire cosmos in their minds' eyes.

Flambeau: Our house should focus on the fire within our minds--our intellect, courage, and wisdom. Without these things, how can we ever achieve greatness?

Geurnicus: Plato is the source of all civilized law. We must be forever wary of those who seek to impose vice and tyranny on the Order.

Jerbiton: Plato showed which arts were worthy of pursuit, and which were vulgar and base. As patron of the mundanes, our house should further the truly noble--the seven liberal arts and philosophy--and spurn the vulgar--the arts of war and the tyranny of the so-called "noble" estate.

Mercere: Plato sought wisdom in Egypt, Pythagoras quested in Persia. All great thinkers were first great travelers.

Merinita: The surface chaos of the faeries masks a greater truth. Faeries are incarnations of the primal forces of thought and love that await us deep within Arcadia.

Tremere: Despite what others may say, members of our house are not tyrants. A tyrant rules by force and greed. Our house recognizes only the true authority of wisdom and intellect, embodied in the art of Certamen.

Tytalus: Friendly rivalry lies at the heart of education. Like Plato's students, however, our house must remember only to engage in rivalries that lead to virtue, not folly.

Verditius: The members of our house who sell enchantments for material gain should be ashamed! Our craft brings the geometry and harmony of the celestial realm into the terrestrial world; it should be a source of good, not greed.

Platonist Mystic Companion

Platonist Template

Starting Abilities: Artes Liberales 3, Concentration 2, Enigmatic Wisdom 2, Legend Lore 3, Nous 2*, Occult Lore 3, Philosophiae 3, Scribe Latin 2, Second Sight 3, Speak Latin 3, Speak Own Language 5

* You cannot spend starting experience points to increase Nous.

Starting Experience Points: 10 + age

Required Virtues and Flaws: Educated +1, Second Sight +1, Noncombatant -2

Nous

By pursuing a life of contemplation and tranquility, Platonists acquire a Nous score. Nous measures your direct connection with the magic realm through spiritual and mental purity.

Nous allows you to perform magic. You may purchase various hedge magic Virtues, modified and discounted, explained below. However, because your magical abilities come directly from your Nous score, any magic roll (including any Magic Resistance) you make that is greater than your current Nous x 5 automatically fails.

Additionally, subtract your current Nous score from your aging rolls, and add Nous to all Perception-based rolls (magical or mundane) and totals and all natural magic resistance rolls.

You must uphold the principles of Platonism to maintain your Nous score. If you lie, participate in trade, or work violence upon any living, mortal creature, you may lose levels of Nous, determined by the troupe or storyguide. Most importantly, although you can vote at Tribunals, you cannot deliberately engage in political intrigues, Hermetic or mundane. Examples include:

1 level: Using animal products. Scheming at a Tribunal. Telling a lie.

3 levels: Bargaining for material gain. Conducting intrigue at a mundane noble's court. Acquiring possession of land.

All levels: Killing another human being.

Nous increases through experience points. With the approval of your troupe or storyguide, you may put 1 point of story experience per story in Nous if you acted in accordance with the ideals of Platonism during the story. Whenever you spend a season studying or teaching Arcane or Academic Knowledges, you earn 1 experience point in Nous.

Platonic Magic Virtues

You may purchase any of these Virtues during character creation. If your Saga contains Mystic Companions from Hedge Magic, you may take up to +8 Virtue points worth of Platonic Magic Virtues at no cost (such points do not count toward your +10 Virtue limit and are not balanced by Flaws) with the approval of the troupe and storyguide. Rumors persist of Platonist secret societies that can also initiate these and even stranger powers.

Transcendence (+3): You can transcend as the ascetics do, substituting your Nous score for Purity (**Hedge Magic** page 52).

Greater Transcendence (+1): You must first purchase Transcendence. You can share the effects of transcendence with other people by adding +3 per person to your Ease Factor. By making a transcendence roll of +24, you can enter the microcosm of someone you touch. The target need not be asleep, and you return to the mundane world whenever the target falls asleep or wakes up (whichever comes first). By rolling +27, you can enter the magic or faerie realm. Returning requires another roll.

Daemon Summoning (+2): You can summon ghosts, hero daemons, or lesser angel daemons using the same mechanics as spirit masters do, substituting Legend Lore for Summoning (**Hedge Magic** page 45).

Magic Circles (+1): You may draw circles of protection, following the same mechanics as spirit masters do, substituting Artes Liberales for Summoning. You do not need to purchase Daemon Summoning to purchase this Virtue.

Incantation (+3): You can perform spells by chanting the names of angels, gods, and heroes. Follow the same mechanics for Name Magic (**Kabbalah** page 110), but substitute Speak Latin for Speak Hebrew and Legend Lore for Name Magic.

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Secondary

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Looks That Kill

Optional Advantages and Disadvantages for *GURPS*

by Dmitri Scull

Numerous fantasy races and creatures have supernatural appearances; either they are so incredibly beautiful that no mortal could compare, or their appearance is enough to turn men into stone. Others can kill or maim with but a gaze. Representing these abilities is problematic at best with existing rules; what follows is a collection of advantages (and a single disadvantage) that can represent these appearance-based effects.

In addition, a further advantage, the Sonic Attack advantage, is included because its effects closely mirror the effects of some appearance attacks. This advantage is for races such as sirens or banshees, who can kill or charm with their voice; this often works well when combined with a matching appearance.

Note that while Immaculate Appearance and Soilproofing may seem to be best used for "silly" campaigns, such as a *GURPS IOU* game, do not underestimate their impact in making a fae or angelic race seem truly beyond mortal ken.

Appearance, Exceedingly Beautiful/Handsome

50 points

The character's appearance goes beyond the normal heights of mortal appearance; this is the beauty of the scions of the gods. In a non-hostile situation, members of the opposite sex (or rather, those attracted to the character's sex) will always be favorable; in less ideal situations, the character receives a +10 bonus to reaction rolls. Further, members of the opposite sex must make a Will roll to be able to directly harm the character (although less scrupulous individuals may harm the character while attempting to -- or as part of -- possessing the character). Members of the same sex (or those not attracted to the character's gender) react to the character at +10, unless they have reason to dislike the character, in which case they react at -10.

This is normally a racial advantage; however, with GM permission, this may be taken by individuals from races where the average racial appearance is Beautiful/Handsome or better.

Appearance, Unearthly Beautiful/Handsome

80 points

The character's appearance rivals that of the gods themselves. Members of the opposite sex (or rather, those attracted to the character's gender) always react favorably, even in hostile situations; they must also make a Will roll at -4 to harm the character (although less savory individuals may harm the character while attempting to possess the character - or as part of that possession). Members of the same sex (or those who are not attracted to the character's gender) will always react favorably to the character in non-hostile situations; if they have reason to dislike the character, the reaction will always be negative. Even characters of the same gender (provided they have no reason to dislike the character) have to make a Will roll to do direct harm to the character.

This is normally a racial advantage; however, with GM permission, this may be taken by individuals from races where the average racial appearance is Very Beautiful/Handsome or better.

Gaze Attack

40 points

The character's gaze causes harm to all that meet it; the victim must make a HT roll or suffer 1d damage from the

attack. Victims strike at -3 if attacking while trying to avoid meeting the gaze of their opponent. There is a downside - if you meet your own gaze in a mirror, you suffer the effects of your own gaze.

Special enhancement: You are at +5 HT to resist your reflection. +25%. If you are immune to your reflection, this is worth +50%.

Special enhancement: There is no HT roll to avoid damage. +50%.

Special enhancement: Rather than do damage, your gaze puts victims to sleep if the HT roll is failed. +0%.

Special enhancement: Rather than do damage, your gaze charms victims if a Will roll (rather than the normal HT roll) is failed, making them subject to your commands as long as they are in your presence, and for five minutes afterward (although they will take no obviously suicidal actions). +10%.

Special enhancement: Rather than do damage, your gaze elicits a specific emotional response (such as hate, fear, or depression) if a Will roll (rather than the normal HT roll) is failed. The victim is subject to the emotion as long as they are in your presence, and for five minutes thereafter. +0%.

Special enhancement: Rather than do damage, your gaze turns victims to stone or slays them outright. +100%.

Special enhancement: For each extra die of damage done, or -2 to the HT roll. +25%.

Special limitation: Your reflection does not carry the attack; you are immune to your reflection, but so is everyone else. -10%. Attacking someone by looking at their reflection is done at -2 to attack.

Special limitation: Victims must be within 100 feet for your gaze to work. -25%.

Special limitation: You are at -5 HT to resist your reflection. -25%. You receive no HT roll to resist your reflection. -50%.

Special limitation: Charmed victims will only obey a single command. -10%.

Hazardous Visage

60 points

This is similar to a gaze attack, but it is the character's appearance which causes damage rather than merely meeting his or her gaze. Victims must make a HT roll or suffer 1d damage if they see you. As do you if you see yourself in a mirror.

Special enhancement: You are at +5 HT to resist your reflection. +25%. You are immune to your reflection. +50%.

Special enhancement: There is no HT roll to avoid damage. +50%.

Special enhancement: Rather than do damage, your visage puts victims to sleep. +0%.

Special enhancement: Rather than do damage, your appearance charms victims if a Will roll (rather than the normal HT roll) is failed, making them subject to your commands as long as they are in your presence, and for five minutes afterward (although they will take no obviously suicidal actions). +10%.

Special enhancement: Rather than do damage, your gaze elicits a specific emotional response (such as hate, fear, or depression) if a Will roll (rather than the normal HT roll) is failed. The victim is subject to the emotion as long as they are in your presence, and for five minutes thereafter. +0%.

Special enhancement: Rather than do damage, your visage turns victims to stone or slays them outright. +100%.

Special enhancement: For each extra die of damage done, or -2 to the HT roll. +25%.

Special limitation: Your reflection does not carry the attack; you are immune to your reflection, but so is everyone else. -10%. Attacking someone by looking at their reflection is done at -2 to attack.

Special limitation: Victims must be within 100 feet for your appearance to be dangerous. -25%.

Special limitation: You are at -5 HT to resist your reflection. -25%. You receive no HT roll to resist your reflection. -50%.

Special limitation: Charmed victims will only obey a single command. -10%.

Immaculate Appearance

5 points

No matter what the character does, his or her appearance is flawless; at least regarding his or her body; clothes and anything carried are another matter entirely. But this does mean that the character's hair, nails, and skin are in perfect condition. This does not prevent the growth of unwanted hair, but will moderate such growth so that it remains even.

Soilproofing

10 points

Anything the character carries (including clothing) is protected from the elements; no dirt, water, or other things of that sort will cause harm to the items or their appearance. This even applies if the character falls into mud or water; all that he or she carries will remain clean and dry. This will not prevent the character from becoming disheveled (although it will keep the character clean and dry); for that, take the Immaculate Appearance advantage.

Special limitation: The soilproofing only applies to dirt (keeping the character's stuff clean, but not dry) or water (keeping it dry, but not clean). -25%

Sonic Attack

60 points

The character can make a sonic attack; a scream, wail, or song that causes harm to all that hear it; the victim must make a HT roll or suffer 1d damage from the attack. The character is immune to his or her own sonic attack.

Special enhancement: There is no HT roll to avoid damage. +50%.

Special enhancement: Rather than do damage, your sonic attack puts victims to sleep. +0%.

Special enhancement: Rather than do damage, your sonic attack deafens victims for 1d minutes. +0%.

Special enhancement: Rather than do damage, your voice charms victims if a Will roll (rather than the normal HT roll) is failed, making them subject to your commands as long as they are in your presence, and for five minutes afterward (although they will take no obviously suicidal actions). +10%.

Special enhancement: Rather than do damage, your voice elicits a specific emotional response (such as hate, fear, or depression) if a Will roll (rather than the normal HT roll) is failed. The victim is subject to the emotion as long as they are in your presence, and for five minutes thereafter. +0%.

Special enhancement: Rather than do damage, your voice slays victims outright. +100%.

Special enhancement: For each extra die of damage done, or -2 to the HT roll. +25%.

Special limitation: Charmed victims will only obey a single command. -10%.

Glowing

Variable

The character glows; whether due to natural phosphorescence, innate nature, or supernatural taint. If the character glows so faintly that it is only noticeable in pitch darkness, this is a quirk, worth -1 point. If the character glows as brightly as a torch (visible at night or in twilight), this is worth -5 points. If the character is as bright as a bonfire (visible in any reduced light), this is worth -10 points. If the character is as bright as a beacon (glowing even in sunlight, and bright at night), this is worth -15 points. If the character otherwise could pass as "normal," this is worth an additional -5 points, unless bought as a quirk. Characters who glow find it nearly impossible to hide; those at the -5 level have a -3 to Stealth, those at -10 have a -6. Characters with Glowing at the -15 level cannot hide at all, unless covered. At night or twilight, archers have a +1 bonus to hit a Glowing character per -5 points of the base disadvantage. Note that characters with Body of Fire or a similar Advantage already glow and do not get points for this.

The Gold Standard

by Eric Lofgren

It seems the lot of every adventuring party to carry around bags upon bags of gold coins and trinkets to pay for everything from a drink at the local tavern to an enchanted sword and a very fine set of polished plate armor. While this is romantic, and does play to everyone's senses of adventure and treasure hunting, is it really practical for intrepid heroes to wander about carrying bags of gold? After all, gold is heavy in comparison to other metals used in coins, such as silver or nickel, and relatively rare. What is a poor DM, trying to build an adventure at least partially grounded in reality, to do? Historically, many other forms of payment existed as alternatives to masses of gold, but somewhere in the mists of history they seem to have been lost. And is gold really all that bad to begin with?

Exploring the problems of gold a bit further, especially weight, as fantasy worlds tend to have an abundance of resources anyway, let us assume for a moment that the gold coins have a diameter of about 2cm, the approximate diameter of one of the new U.S. gold covered dollar coins, and a thickness of 1mm, again roughly the size of the U.S. coin. Now, as we accept only the finest in gold currency for our mighty heroes, the coin is made out of 100% real, genuine gold. The final rough weight of a single gold coin is 6.25 ounces, meaning 5 of these beautiful coins weigh two pounds. With a weight allowance of a full 40 pounds entirely for the carrying of gold, our hypothetical heroes can lug about 100 gold coins, in the world of fantasy not a whole heck of a lot, maybe enough to buy a good sturdy long sword and some leather armor. But what about the real world? As a test of our wondrous monetary standard, let's examine the last time Europe had a really stable, unified currency: Rome.

The Roman Empire had created a fairly stable and standardized monetary system before it collapsed, at which time the entire monetary system of Europe was thrown into chaos, and barter became fashionable once again. Since most fantasy is based off of medieval England, we shall examine what our gold will buy in a Roman colony on the British Isles in AD 1. The purchase of an attractive female slave would set the party back 240 gold coins, taking her out of the financial picture, and the more modest general slave will only cost 60 gold, dwindling the party's cash reserves rather severely. But our heroes, being on the side of justice and right, don't feel the need to expand their ranks the easy way, so what will just the absolute essentials of travel cost? Two pounds of pork will only set us back a single gold coin, and the wine to wash it down with will cost another. A pound of good wool to stop the chain mail from chaffing will only cost 7, and a replacement pair of shoes will cost another 3 coins. This all sounds very reasonable you say, it sounds like the gold standard is working quite nicely. That's all well and good, but what about the finer things in life and adventuring? What happens when you want to buy magic armor of protection and a war galley? Or how about just ordering a slice of pork, not the entire pig? Smaller coins -- like copper or silver -- can handle the small ticket items, but the stuff of heroes begin to break the gold coin system down. After all, just how much will all of this weigh?

Fine, white silk would cost our party a tidy 480 gold coins, or a full 192 pounds worth, for only one pound of silk in return. A fine suit of armor, as it would have to be custom fit for the wearer, would similarly cost a great deal of money and crush your party under the weight of gold. So would the greatsword you bought, most likely made by smiths in mainland Europe, like the Celts. Obviously, if we are pursuing reality, or at least a close proximity, the purchase of supplies for true adventurers calls for some other form of payment. However, gold is always a helpful standby for smaller items, or places where, for one reason or another, everything is done in cold, hard currency, such as the black market.

Choosing some solid currency with greater value, like precious stones, could for the moment solve the problem, but these kinds of stones are very rare, and more than a little bit of overkill if all you want is a room for the night. However, the Romans (and others) did something that worked well then, and still works well now: they opened their checkbooks. Archeological evidence indicates that the ancient Sumerians possessed stone cylinders with unique seals on them, different for each person. These cylinders were primitive debt cards, allowing the user to buy the item and pay at a later date, or refer it to some other institution. There is also evidence that Jewish merchants within the Roman Empire had an entire network of banks that would accept notes of credit, similar to the modern day checking systems, allowing business to be conducted entirely without cash changing hands until someone went to the bank. But how does

one take these examples and slip them into a story? What if my character is out in the middle of the frontier, not near a major port city where banking can take place?

The most obvious solution presents itself if the game you are playing in is technologically advanced enough to have printing presses, the party can simply use paper money put out by the local government and the problem is solved. Assuming you can't take the nice, easy, straight road to currency sanity, let's look at some other options. The first, and especially useful early in the game or story, would be barter, either for goods or services. For example, in many campaigns it's common to find a spell scroll that no one needs, or arrows that no one wants. Perhaps an innkeeper would be interested, depending on how common magic (or archery) is within your world. Players could seek creative ways to get what they want, perhaps trading a bard their tale for some supplies, or clear out outlaws from the nearby forest in exchange for lodging in a farm house for a few days. Barter, especially for a well-balanced party, can provide many opportunities that go beyond just earning a day's wages. These missions may expand into sub-quests, and chances for experience or deepening the plot of an adventure. And it works; if the players are more interested in a compelling story than treasure, an entire adventure can be played out in freeform subplots. For example, a hero could book passage on a pirate ship and sail off to glory and yes, a share of gold . . . without money of any sort changing hands beforehand. In this example, martial characters could provide strength of arm, while a magic-wielding hero could provide useful spells (like wind control).

Perhaps another way to make your way through the world without having to lug about a knapsack full of coins, especially for writers of pure fiction or those playing free-form RPGs, is the simple good name of your characters and their associates. Characters that enjoy membership in large guilds have their own reputation as upstanding public citizens, or the patronage of someone with the gold to back their bills, can and did frequently offer letters of credit, or someone's "mark," in exchange for goods and services. Once these slips of paper, sometimes bearing a seal and sometimes merely a signature and amount, were distributed, they became legal tender and were commonly exchanged and sold until they made their way back to the original author. Characters with very high reputations, royal or noble patronage or who are members of whatever powerful organizations exist in your realm, can almost entirely rely on payment against their good name or the name of their sponsors. Of course, some limits would have to be placed on this method of spending to prevent characters from living beyond their means. The threat of having the sponsorship of whomever is paying the final bill is usually effective, especially if that patron provides some other kind of support throughout the story. Going even farther, groups such as Guilds or clans could potentially produce their own forms of currency once the printing press has been established, or the guild is willing to produce a great deal of them the old fashioned (or enchanted) way. The Italian city of Florence had very heavy guild influences in it, and similar cities in your realm could produce letters of credit that, through common use, became almost the established currency of the city.

Each of these ways of a party paying its way through adventure provides drawbacks and strengths. Gold has been, and very likely always will be, viewed as a standard of wealth, and it nearly ubiquitous in RPGs. Barter is cheap, and allows for both character and plot development in the guise of earning a meal, but it can only go so far. And finally letters of credit and notes against the writer's good name provide an easy means of paying for anything along the trip but they rely on the party having a good reputation and presumably deep-pocketed backers behind the scenes willing to foot the bill. DMs and writers looking for a new, more realistic or simply different way of having their mighty band pay for that one sword sitting in the shop window, would be advised to consider an alternative to gold, than think about what it would do to the mechanics of the story. And always keep the law of unintended consequences in mind when playing with the economy.

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Pyramid Review

U.S. Patent No. 1

Published by [Cheapass Games](#)

Designed by James Ernest and Falko Goettsch

Boxed game; \$7.00

Like a couple of their more recent releases, Cheapass Games' *U.S. Patent No. 1* is slightly less, well, cheapass than their usual releases. Gone is the simple white envelope, replaced by a sturdy cardboard box of about the same size. The card components are of good quality, printed in a single color, and as usual, you have to provide many of the basic items of play -- in this case, a token and counter for each player, three six-sided dice, and enough poker chips, counters, or play money to simulate about \$20 per player.

But Cheapass isn't selling cool components and flashy art -- they're selling solid game design. And *U.S. Patent No. 1* is another example. Each player has invented time travel in their own time (a concept that quickly become meaningless once time travel is at your disposal), and races to be the first in line when the U.S. Patent Office opens for business on July 30, 1790 -- thus getting the coveted U.S. Patent No. 1 and cornering the market.

There are nine time periods, from 1790 up to 2168, that can be your home base. You travel up and down the timeline from there, trying to assemble a complete time machine and have it at the patent office when your number is called. At the same time, you're trying to stop everybody else from doing the same thing. That's where the weapons come in.

Each time machine has four components, and you must have them all -- in working order -- on your time machine when your number is called. Chassis determines your speed, Weapons allow you to attack other time machines, Shields protect you from those same attacks, and Power determines how good the other three cards on your machine can be. Each card is rated on a scale of 1 to 12. With a Power of 12 (plus the 5 all time machines get to start), you can at best have 17 points to spend on the other three features -- not nearly enough. This is the major strategic puzzle in *U.S. Patent No. 1* -- customizing your machine's features to your needs at any particular point in the game. Components get switched out, discarded, bought, found, stolen, and even shot off all the time, so flexibility in your strategy is not only possible, but essential.

Which is the most important component? I wish I knew. It seems every time I play, I run into a situation where the thing I need the most is my weakest component. If you can arrange it so that happens less often to you than to the other players, your chances of victory will go up. I think you can skimp a little bit on your Chassis, since with a board only nine time periods in length, the maximum speed you need is 8 (and even a very low-cost Chassis can do that, with a good die roll). Since beginning the game in one of the middle time periods is a slight advantage, those players begin the game with a little less money. Personally, I'd rather have the extra cash and take the set-up disadvantage -- after the first couple of turns, starting position no longer has any bearing on things. But that's just me.

In combat, the attacker gets to add two dice to the value of his Weapon, while the defender only adds one die to his Shield -- so to have a fair chance, your Shield needs to be worth 3 or 4 points more than the Weapon you're facing. That would imply that the Shield is the most important component. But sometimes, especially if there are a lot of perfectly good replacement components laying around in the various time periods, it's better to just pick up a new card instead of spending a lot of points on protecting the ones you already have. It's just another sneaky bit of strategy from a company (and designer) that specializes in "simple" little games that are far from simple to figure out.

The rules are short and clear, the art is appropriate (and entirely raided from the public domain -- they don't call this

place "Cheapass" for nothing), and the cards are sturdy. Many of the components have cute names, too (an 8-point Chassis named "Foglio's Racing Dirigible" is a shout-out to Ernest's friend Phil Foglio, for example). *U.S. Patent No. I* is light-hearted, entertaining, and enough of a strategic challenge to make you want to play it more than once. A lot more.

--*Scott D. Haring*

Pyramid Pick

Mortal Coils (for Call of Cthulhu)

Published by [Pagan Publishing](#)

Written by Michael Cisco, John H. Crowe III, Dennis Detwiler, Jeff Moeller, Rebecca Strong, and John Tynes

Illustrated by Toren Atkinson, Dennis Detwiler, and Heather Hudson

208-page perfect bound soft cover; \$20.95

Mortal Coils was the next release for *Call of Cthulhu* from Pagan Publishing after *Delta Green* and the "ghoulicious" *The Realm of Shadows*. It is, apart from the reprints of scenarios from early issues of their magazine *The Unspeakable Oath*, the only anthology that Pagan Publishing has released. There are eight scenarios altogether. All but two are set in the USA, with the earliest in 1900 and the latest in 1929. Although separate from each other, all are thematically linked -- each story is concerned with the players saving or investigating the loss of some poor soul's "mortal coil."

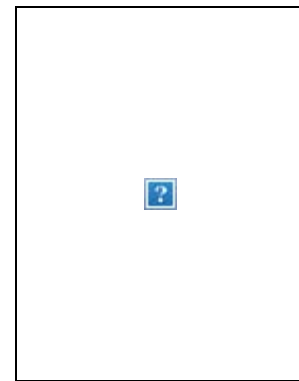
Considering the usual quality of Pagan Publishing's books, my expectations for *Mortal Coils* were certainly high. In terms of appearance and layout, it certainly does not disappoint. It looks dark and foreboding, with some really quite lovely artwork. Dennis Detwiler does much of the interior art, and stating that his are the best illustrations in *Mortal Coils* should in no way make light of the work by either Toren Atkinson or Heather Hudson.

[SPOILER ALERT!]

The book opens with "Vigilante Justice" by John H. Crowe III. This is set in turn-of-the-century rural Kentucky, but can be adjusted up until 1920. The daughter of one of the player characters has gone missing, which makes for very personal involvement. It breaks with the standard *Call of Cthulhu* scenario in that it requires more legwork than bookwork. Both their local knowledge and their local acquaintances will also prove important to solving this mystery. Although this is very much a one-off adventure, it would work well if played as part of the origins of a female investigator character who grew up to oppose Mythos machinations in the twenties.

The second adventure, "A Murder of Crows," is also by John H. Crowe III and takes us into the familiar territory of missing academics or students. Two brothers have gone missing in Louisiana while researching a lost Indian tribe. Clues lead to an isolated community on the edge of the swamps, but neither brother is there. Of course, this is the type of adventure that we have seen before, but the new twists on old ideas -- especially as they are the kind of dark twists that we have come to expect from Pagan Publishing -- do serve to make this a more interesting adventure. Although it can take place at anytime during the twenties, elements within the scenario do suggest that it takes place earlier in the decade rather than the latter.

We return to rural Kentucky for Jeff Moeller's "Nightcap," after a young man goes missing, leaving behind a strange crystal bottle full of an even stranger liquid. This is for more experienced players and requires a little knowledge of Dreamlands. "God of the Mountain," by Michael Cisco, like the "A Murder of Crows" before it, has the investigators on the trail of another brace of academics, but this time into darkest Peru. Why has nothing been heard from the pair, who are visiting a recently discovered Inca city? This is perhaps the most difficult to run adventure within *Mortal Coils*, but not because of the writing. Rather that it relies heavily upon the Keeper to build and instill a sense of foreboding and build the atmosphere for the players.



Jeff Moeller's second adventure, "Common Courtesy" is only loosely Mythos related. The oddness here comes in the players deciding whether or not they should prevent millennia old funeral rites. Although these involve human sacrifice, the participants are (for a change) mostly willing! Likewise, Rebecca Strong's "We Have Met The Enemy" places the players in a moral quandary -- how far will they go to stop a summoning? Why was an investigator's uncle tortured and if they failed to get anything out of him before he died, what sort of mess has he left his niece or nephew?

Although "We Have Met The Enemy" itself does not take the investigators to India, the two articles from issue #16/17 of *The Unspeakable Oath* ("The Deceivers" by David Perry and A. Scott Glancy -- an examination of the Thuggee cult and "Dhanurvidya, Varman and Avarna", Michael J. Varhola's article on Indian arms and armor) might be useful references for running this scenario.

More traditional is John Tynes' "Dream Factory." Easily the best of the anthology, the players must find a Hollywood starlet who has disappeared on the eve of her success. This has heavy noir elements and one can see the influence of films such as *Barton Fink* and *The Player* in this scenario. Elements within this adventure appear later in the more modern context of Pagan Publishing's *Delta Green: Countdown* supplement.

It is aimed at more experienced Keepers, as the adventure is driven by the actions of the NPCs rather than by given events. The plot is also quite complex and more adult in its themes, though this is to be expected from Pagan Publishing. Like other adventures in the anthology, this one is restricted in terms of the timeframe in which it can be run, but in this case, even more so... Specifically "Dream Factory" takes place towards the end of the "silent era" in 1926, and really could not be run outside of that.

The final adventure, "Mysteria Matris Oblitae," by Dennis Detwiller, takes a scientific team to the revolutionary Mexico of 1929. Mexico City University is sent a photograph of a bizarre creature shot and killed in the jungle near the town of Tula. The main method of getting characters involved in this adventure is via scientific inquiry and may not lend itself to readily involving the more traditional type of *Call of Cthulhu* investigator. Unless the keeper uses "Mysteria Matris Oblitae" as an introductory scenario, then it really only works as a one-off adventure.

[END SPOILER ALERT]

Mortal Coils has only one weakness, and that is its lack of flexibility. Not all of the scenarios can be easily incorporated into an existing campaign and most are very time specific; in other words, few could be updated to the modern era. Of course, it should be pointed out that most are not written with this intent in mind. Yet this is a minor detraction from a book full of well-crafted material, which is definitely for the mature gamer, both in terms of some disturbing ideas and art.

Mortal Coils is an anthology for keepers looking for ideas or who want an adventure to run for their players that is just that little bit different and stronger in tone.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

Evil (for d20)

Published by [AEG](#)

Writing by **A.A. Acevedo, J.D. Douglass, Noah Dudley, Peter Flanagan, Chris Hussey, Mike Leader, Mike Mearls, Jim Pinto and Ree Soesbee**

128 pages; \$19.95

Prepare for a walk on the Dark Side.

Fantasy RPGs nearly all promote the idea that PCs will enter a world where Evil reigns supreme, and are to incarnate the only heroes strong enough and Good enough to bring peace and light back to the world. Of course, every experienced GM knows it's hard to find good heroes. Even when the players don't openly declare they're just playing cold-blooded mercenary killers, they're playing Paladins who act more like cold-blooded mercenary killers. A GM might look at them and wonder why they don't just roll up a party of bad guys.

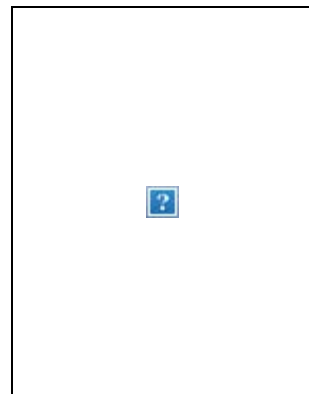
Well, now, with AEG's *Evil*, they can.

Evil attempts to be a comprehensive guide to Villainous Roleplaying in the *d20* system, for both players and GMs, with new feats, new prestige classes, new spells, new monsters, and a lot of tips for running Evil campaigns. It even includes a disclaimer, warning not to perform any of the evil acts described within the book itself. The book is divided into two major sections: "The Evil that Men Do," which centers around Evil characters, and "Mercy is for the Weak," which focuses on Evil campaigns. Consider these parts like the *Player's Handbook* and *GM's Handbook* for Evil, respectively.

"The Evil that Men Do" starts out with some philosophical attempts at defining exactly what is Evil; here, some essays from AEG's previous product, *Dungeons*, are reused, but they make sense in this book. This first section does a rather good job of explaining a villain's psychology in a logical manner (some villains believe they're actually heroes, while others embrace their Evil), and will most likely help roleplayers looking for inspiration in playing evil characters well.

Then comes a section on Fiends, summoning them and bargaining with them. This section starts with the psychology of Demons, Devils, and the rumor of the existence of Daemons (a.k.a. the Yugoloths, which are meant to return in the *Manual of the Planes*). Then comes the gains (and costs) of dealing with Fiends: Bargains, Servitude Contracts (either side), and Infernal Pacts. Infernal Pacts are a set of feats available to characters with Infernal Pacts, granting powers somewhat beyond normal feats, such as Darkvision, Flight, Wealth, etc. New rules are given to handle Demon Summoning and deal-making, including a new Prestige Class -- the Demon Summoner -- and a few new spells for summoning Fiends.

After a short run-over of Evil Religions (including a handful of new Evil gods for any setting and new Prestige Domains, such as Blood, Corruption and Lust), we're given archetypes for roleplaying some more traditional Evil characters, such as the Brute, the Insecure tyrant, the Loyal lieutenant and the Machiavellian Manipulator. The Background of Evil non-humans is given a brush-over before skills and feats are given a better look: Old skills are shown new uses (such as crafting shoddy goods with Craft), and new skills are introduced, such as Bully, uses Strength to persuade people, rather than Charisma (thus giving a new option for players wanting to use their low charisma Half-Orc to push other people around). The new Feats emphasize villains' actions, such as Bribery (a bonus



to Diplomacy when bribing people), Living Shield (using hostages to protect yourself) and Tyrant (like Leader, but with a body of followers cowed into obedience).

After a section of new spells, we have the two other Prestige Classes of this book, the Blood Archer and the Bargainer. These are more or less forgettable, unless you can find a real use for them.

The second part of the book, "Mercy is for the Weak," is dedicated to creating and running Evil campaigns. Strong tips are given to encourage Team roleplaying, even among parties of sinister villains. Roleplaying cool, memorable villains is encouraged over simply catering to old stereotypes and senseless carnage. Also, the intervention of heroes is repeatedly mentioned; just as Heroic PCs arrive to spoil Evil NPC plots, it is suggested to the GM that Heroic NPCs should often try to spoil Evil PC plots.

Evil followers (called Lackeys) are covered, with the caveat that expecting NPCs to do a PCs job generally leads the classic result of having one's Lackeys fail miserably. Lairs are covered in depth, as are evil organizations, complete with some examples. There are adventure hooks for evil parties of levels Low to High, and new monsters, which mostly include Good creatures . . . the ones most likely to fight Evil parties. New artifacts are also given, which include interesting backgrounds suitable for launching adventures from.

The book ends with a sample Evil campaign setting: Suras Sans, the City of Dusk -- a festering cancer of a city placed right on the border between the lands of the living and the dark worlds of the Shadow Lands. It is a city of Evil and Darkness, where Good characters can find no place. In short, a haven (such as it is) for villains of all kinds and races (though Humans dominate at 50%), where opportunities for profit and peril both await the intrepid villain.

The book, while it contains some interesting tips for roleplaying evil characters, suffers somewhat in its gaming content: The Blood Archer and Bargainer Prestige Classes seemed somewhat odd for a book about generic villainy. Maybe something more like a Black Knight for fallen Paladins and Fighters, or a Master of Deception for evil Illusionists would have been better suited.

The book's organization also leaves a bit to be desired; the various book sections seem to be confused as to whether or not they're aiming at PCs or NPCs. The classification of entries isn't as well settled; the Demon Summoning Prestige Class, for example, should probably be with the other Prestige Classes, with Demon Summoning being covered separately.

In spite of these flaws, *Evil* does have some good elements for gamers interested in the challenge of Evil characters and campaigns. If they believe they can handle the Darkness . . .

--*Rolland Therrien*

Wanted: Replacement Dennis

As I hinted last week, I GMed my first game of 2001 last Saturday. And it went, all told, pretty well.

Since most of us in the gaming group were new to each other, I'm structuring this game as a three-part mini-series, with an option to continue on to an ongoing series afterwards. That way, if we all hate each other, there's no shame in breaking up the group after three sessions, *and* we will have a complete storyline.

So I planned out the first adventure, we met, and everyone seemed to have a pretty good time. In fact, there was only one *bitty* problem.

I'd planned the adventure for my old group.

I'm convinced that, consciously or sub-, many of us GMs tend to get used to creating adventures geared towards our current groups. This is usually good; in long-running groups, you can tailor special and significant adventures to your players. In return, they get used to your idiosyncrasies as a GM.

Of course, this only works if you're still with the same group.

So when the heroes in the first adventure decide to antagonize the barbarians investigating the army they've infiltrated - - hoping both forces would go to battle and help take each other out, and also providing an opportunity to destroy some incriminating papers -- this was unexpected.

Certainly Dennis, my old player who moved away (<sniffle>) wouldn't have done that. But, of course, none of my new players are Dennis. And it's not fair to expect them to be. These new players can (and will) add a new mix to the game . . . but only if I let them, instead of trying to "replace" another player.

Interestingly, even though one of my players was in my old group, she found herself acting differently than we both expected . . . even going along with the barbarian plan. "It must be the new group," we concluded.

(And as an aside, Dennis is also part of a group that loves to [plan things out to the smallest detail](#) . . . even though he doesn't do that in our groups.)

So I started thinking back. I've been in groups where we, collectively, felt compelled to craft detailed backgrounds and campaign information. I've been in groups that didn't believe in background so much as a contemplative chatty angst-fest. That same group became more dynamic and "pulp-y" with the addition of one new player. I've been in some groups where one player was great; I've been in other groups where that same player was not-so-good.

I've arranged some groups with my favorite players, and they just didn't "click." I've had other groups that I was sure would fail, and provided wonderful gaming opportunities. I've seen fire, and I've seen rain . . . er, sorry.

So, anyway, for those of you seeking to fill out the ranks of your gaming group with new blood, just make sure you're not saddling them with old expectations. Each player is unique, and each play *group* is unique. But that doesn't mean it can't be fun.

* * *

And I *promise* I'll get that *Exalted* review to you all next week. This has been a longer-than-expected week, but next week should be better.

* * *

Ken Hite is still trying to get his schedule back on track. Hopefully he'll be back real soon.

In the interim, I'd like to point out that, since we had a bit more room than usual, we're running a longer adventure than normal (The *Conspiracy X* adventure "Blood And Madness"). Although I'm always interested in your opinions, I'm particularly interested in your thoughts on these longer pieces. Do you want to see more (with another tiny article or two each week)? None? Would you rather we split them into two parts? (We'll be doing a couple of those over the next few months . . .) Feel free to write me with your opinions at pyramid@sjgames.com, or start up a thread over in the [sjgames.pyramid discussion boards](#).

--*Steven Marsh*

* * *

Last week's answer: GURPS Technomancer, p. 127.

(Two stars) "It's a mean world out there. The sorcerer upstairs conjures too loud; the guy down the hall drinks blood from a six-pack; that stiff you left in the alley is up and walking around."

Murphy's Rules



by John Kovalic

Murphy's Rules



Murphy's Rules



Blood And Madness

An adventure for *Conspiracy X*

by Stephen Hunt

Chapter One: Introduction

While this is an adventure set in Washington DC, it is easily transplanted to any location. The only area particularly keyed to the Washington area is the Capitol Hill office of Senator Michael Smith. His private residence can easily be located anywhere, and investigators needing to interview Senator Smith could do so just as easily at a regional office maintained by the Senator.

Plot Synopsis

Senator Michael Smith is a well thought of politician, who is tipped by many political commentators for bigger and better things.

Publicly, he is well known for his support of genetic research programs, campaigning stridently for greater freedom in the field in order to bring the benefits of scientific breakthroughs to mankind.

Privately, Smith is adept in the ways of magic, and his scientific pursuits are closely allied with such powers. He foresees great potential in the bonding of science and magic.

On his private estate, Smith plays host to a complex owned by Gentek Inc., a prime mover in the world of genetic research. Ostensibly, this is just a records office but for Smith, it is the means by which he is able to experiment.

Smith has recently imported a collection of plant bulbs from Gentek's Eastern European office. The plant that grows from these bulbs is, in fact, a beautiful woman designed to entrance her victims and then draw their blood from their bodies. In sorcery, blood is power, and Smith needs such blood for his ceremonies. The Totemtanz, or Death Dancer, can do this for him. Blood can also be used to feed the young saplings. Totemtanz attacks her victims using ribbons, which are actually part of her body. These extend from her wrists, and as she weaves her dance around her victim, they both cut and drink the victim's blood at the same time. They are razor sharp but composed purely of organic material.

Her first victim is the man who delivered the crate; an Eastern European sailor named Radostin Popov. Totemtanz kills him on Smith's instructions. If you kill the messenger, there is no way for him to pass his message on to another, unless of course dead men can tell tales . . .

Information Gathering

Both police and criminal contacts may prove useful during the adventure. Police or scientific contacts can be used to authenticate the credentials of either the coroner or the police officers involved in the case. In both instances, they show up as clean and good in their respective fields, an expert in the case of the coroner. Criminal contacts will also lead the party to Ramirez, a gentleman of low repute who has had a run-in with people that he wishes he hadn't.

Timescale

The party is in no great rush to reach the end of the adventure. The police are mystified by the murder, and miss any link to the Senator. Totemtanz is more subtle about her other targets, picking up vagrants and disposing of them in the

greenhouse at the estate. If the party are struggling, then Sgt. Herman will contact them again and notify them of vagrants disappearing. Staking out the seedy side of town will lead to spotting Totemtanz leading a vagrant into a black limo. Following that will lead to the Senator's estate. If you do have to use this method, penalize the players by having a second Totemtanz hatched and ready to feed when the players reach the adventure's conclusion.

Chapter Two: A Beginning . . .

Hooks

Coroner's Report

The Aegis group's wranglers send them a folder, either delivered in person or through the HERMES computers. The folder that is submitted details the death of a mysterious man, an immigrant, and suggests a gangland connection.

Alternatively, the players may have a connection with the coroner's office. Whatever happens, both the crime report and coroner's report are made available to the Cell (see handouts 1 and 2).

Newspaper Monitoring

If the players actively pursue information by checking the newspapers on a regular basis, reward them by letting them find the following clipping:

A man's body was found severely mutilated in downtown Washington DC this morning.

The body, as yet unidentified, was discovered by police in an alleyway off Roosevelt Avenue. Police state that the body was disfigured by literally hundreds of cut wounds. It is not yet known what kind of knife was used to inflict such wounds.

The body was discovered at half past midnight and, although a number of people were in the vicinity at the time, police have admitted they have few leads to go on.

Independent witnesses state that a gang called The Watchers had been sighted in the area at the time, although police are refusing to link the murder to any gangland activity.

A police spokesman said that a murder investigation was underway, and that any witnesses to the crime should contact Sgt. Michael Herman on 555-431-2212 at the South Washington precinct.

Handout 1

INTERCEPTED TRANSMISSION>>

TERMINAL 18843/23/23/094 (SOUTH WASHINGTON POLICE PRECINCT)

TO: MAIN POLICE DATABASE AND FBI OFFICES, WASHINGTON DC

Crime: Homicide

Suspects: None at present

Reporting Officer: Sgt. Michael Herman, South Precinct

Officer's Statement: Responding to a call of a disturbance in an alleyway off Roosevelt Avenue at 00.30, we discovered a body -- or what was left of it.

The body was that of a male Caucasian, age indeterminate, who was covered with a huge number of cuts and scars, but no obvious quantity of blood.

There was no obvious sign of a perpetrator, so we called in the forensic squad. I left my partner, Officer Jude Patron, with the body, and proceeded to start on house-to-house questioning.

Nobody saw anything, heard anything, or knew anything. By the time I had got done with the first few places, the forensics had arrived and as Jude met up with me, I saw a few street punks stood off to one side, watching. I went over to them and started to ask a few questions but they drifted off. One of them, probably around the youngest, said just one thing to me.

He said: "It's the bad juju, the streets claiming their own."

He also said something in what I think was German, but I wasn't sure. They left before I could get them to make a statement. I have been unable to track them down since. Each wore black leather jackets, with red T-shirts. On the back of the jackets was the word Watchers.

Handout 2

INTERCEPTED TRANSMISSION>>

FORENSIC REPORT RELATING TO PREVIOUS CASE

FROM TERMINAL 22J1B, CORONER'S OFFICE

LOGIN AND PASSWORD FOR Dr. JUDITH MANSFIELD

Forensic Report

Subject: John Doe

Inspecting coroner: Dr. Judith Mansfield

Cause of death: Multiple lacerations, exsanguination

The victim was male, aged between 30 and 35 years, and Caucasian. Brown, dirty hair, gray eyes. The victim was a large man, standing around 6 foot 1 inches and muscular -- looks like he was a laborer of some description. Blood type O Negative. He may be of Eastern European extraction. Among his possessions was a piece of notepaper with the name of a ship -- the Nikolai -- and port 23, NYC written on it. Having checked with the shipping register, this was registered at a port along the Black Sea.

The victim was killed by a combination of the vast number of cuts he had suffered, all very thin and with no trace of metal in the wounds, and the massive blood loss associated with that number of wounds, around 400 or so.

However, there was little in the way of blood on the body or at the scene of the crime. It

appears to have been removed in some fashion. But I know of no weapon which could cut a man and remove his blood at the same time. Conclusion: the blood must have been removed very shortly before the assault with the unknown edged weapon. The timing must have been very close, as there is no discernible evidence to show that the wounds were inflicted post mortem.

Most of the wounds were very shallow, none exceeding three inches in depth.

There appears to be little sign that the victim struggled, and no major disturbance at the scene. There were no signs of skin underneath the victim's fingernails nor were there excessive levels of lactic acid in the body.

Finding it difficult to believe that someone could endure such an assault and not put up a fight, I carried out a full range of drug and toxicology tests on his blood, but could only find evidence of alcohol, at a level of 40ml. He may have been drunk, but not enough to matter.

Other personal effects included \$20 in cash, a set of unmarked keys, a business card for McGillicuddy's Bar and a cheap watch.

Conclusion: Victim was killed by a combination of blood loss and the shock suffered from in excess of 400 lacerations. No evidence found to assist in identifying the killer.

Chapter Three: Tracing The Killer

Straight away, there are several leads for the party to pursue. First of all, there are the policemen to question and the coroner's office could provide a few leads. McGillicuddy's Bar is worth checking out, and the players may be intrigued by the Watchers.

The Police

Tracking down Sgt. Herman and Officer Patron is a simple task. They operate out of the South Washington precinct and are best tackled at Rudy's Bar after their shift. If the party ask at the precinct, they are told that Rudy's is usually the best place to catch them, as they are out on patrol most of the time.

Once questioned, the two will exchange uneasy glances before starting to talk. If given a reasonable story as to why the party members are investigating, then they will open up a little. Sgt. Herman will do the bulk of the talking, while Officer Patron will continue to shift awkwardly in his seat.

Sgt Herman will be quite frank about matters. He's been on the job for a good few years and while he has not seen anything like this before, he seems quite affable, talking openly about the fact that you cannot write everything in a report.

As he says, "Yeah, it was weird. But hey, what can you write in a report? Jeez, that body struck a chill down my spine the minute I saw it. No blood. None. Not a drop, not an ounce. Nuttin'. I had more blood on my clothes, cause I'd cut myself shaving that morning. But on him? Zip.

"I'm used to folks not talkin' when a murder happens, but there was something different 'bout everyone I questioned. Sure, there were a few whose reflex response was to clam up, but I honestly believe nobody saw -- or maybe nobody remembered -- what happened . . . "

When pressed as to what he means by "nobody remembered," he says that some of the people he spoke to seemed to be not quite there, like they were spaced on drugs or something, and those that were like that were the ones closest to

the murder site. Not anything he could prove or anything he could write in a report without thinking his superiors would want to know why the hell he was putting unfounded suspicions in an official report, but that's the way it felt.

As for the Watchers, Herman is familiar with all of the gangs who operate in and around his patrol area, but he's never come across the Watchers before or since. That seems to be the thing that concerns him the most -- strangers on his patch, though one or two of his colleagues have also reported seeing the gang in different areas.

Officer Patron is far more uncertain when it comes to speaking. He's a rookie, has only been on the job for the last year and a half, and defers to Herman every chance he gets.

What he does say, eventually, when Herman is distracted talking, is in a whisper to the nearest player . . . or maybe no-one in particular. All he says is, "There was this woman. I . . . I saw her . . . down the end of the alley . . . and then she was gone. Just like that. I never saw her again . . . but I hope I do . . . one day."

If brought up on what he has just said, Officer Patron denies he said anything, says the investigator must be hearing things, and shuts up, before excusing himself and heading for the bar.

While he is there, Herman confides that Patron has not been the same since the murder. "Ordinarily, the kid's at the heart of the party, but lately . . . he's just not been the same."

Sgt. Michael Herman

Str 3	Siz 4
Agl 2	Ref 3
Int 4	Will 4

Skills

Drive Auto 2 Small Arms: Pistol 2
Forensics 1

Training

Awareness: Criminal Activity
Investigation

Officer Jude Patron

Str 3	Siz 3
Agl 4	Ref 4
Int 3	Will 1

Skills

Drive Auto 2 Small Arms: Pistol 1
Melee Weapon 1

Training

Investigation

The Coroner's Office

While the policemen were quite willing to talk freely, Dr. Mansfield is far more reluctant. Players will need to tug a string or two to get her to talk, or show that they are in an official investigatory body to convince her to open up.

Having come across as stern prior to being convinced, when she opens up, Dr. Mansfield gives more the air of a studious professional who has just been overworked. She can be slightly flippant, and if anyone comments on her tiredness, she'll snap back "Welcome to Washington DC, murder capital of the US of A. No rest for a coroner."

She is genuinely mystified by the condition of the body, most particularly by the absence of any fragments inside the wound. She estimates that the whole attack was over within 30 seconds, and she is not convinced that the blood was withdrawn prior to the wounds being inflicted. The body was completely drained of blood, and no matter how much she searched the murder site, there was not a trace to be found. She also confirms that the body was not moved to the location it was found in. Again, like Sgt. Herman, Dr. Mansfield is troubled by the case, and has not released the body for burial yet. She has cited the fact that the body is unidentified as yet as one reason, but will admit that she is calling in one of her old teachers to come and take a look, a blood specialist by the name of Dr. Newcombe. He will not arrive for four days, however, so the body is on ice until then.

She concludes by saying: "Look, I wish I had time to look into this case more, but hey, here we get a couple bodies a day coming through -- let alone all the reports of vagrants going missing you get in a city like this. Sometimes I get a body and by the time I see it, rats have had their way with it for weeks. I see a lot of things which ain't pretty. I see a lot of things I wish I didn't. Sure, this is weird, but so's the human race for all the horrible ways it manages to come up with for doing harm to one another."

Note: Dr. Newcombe's arrival is not relevant to the case. All it means is that the body will be in the morgue for four days, should players devise a way to get a look at it by nefarious means. Dr. Mansfield is very reluctant to show the players the body herself, as it is evidence, and will only do so by direct order from a superior. If the party try to contact Dr. Newcombe separately, he will be unavailable. His credentials, if checked, prove to be impeccable. He is a senior resident at a major hospital in Detroit, but is presently away on a conference.

Dr. Judith Mansfield

Str 2	Siz 2
Agl 2	Ref 3
Int 5	Will 4

Skills

Computer Use 2	First Aid 3
Forensics 3	Medical 3
Photography 2	Research 2
Science: Biology 3	Teaching 1
Video 1	

Training

Awareness: Evidence Procedures
Biohazard Controls Investigation

The Body

The body is a gruesome sight indeed, with lacerations from top to toe, the body is in a terrible state, and matches up with the post mortem description. The face is also heavily lacerated, and identification will be difficult. If Dr. Mansfield is showing them the body, she is hopeful that an ID can be made with dental records or fingerprints. Anybody with the appropriate expertise and the opportunity can carry out an examination of the body and find the same results as Dr. Mansfield, unless they can succeed in a Df4 test in Medical or Biology, in which case they find a tiny sliver of material inside one of the deeper wounds. The material appears to be cloth but, as the investigator touches it, the material draws a tiny line of blood across a finger -- it's sharp in some way, and needs further examination in an appropriately equipped lab. Dr. Mansfield would be happy to examine it, if the players trust her.

Such further examination reveals, after one research breakthrough, that the material is organic, composed of plant material. Two further breakthroughs reveal that the material is thick towards the center portion, but is monomolecular on the edges, providing a startlingly sharp cutting edge. Two further breakthroughs reveal that the plant material appears to be mixed with some kind of animal DNA.

The Ship

The Nikolai is docked in New York, and should players make the journey to visit it, they will find it largely deserted. The Nikolai has already dispersed its cargo by the time the party arrives, along with most of its crew. The captain is away settling accounts, so it is down to his second, Vladimir Kinder, to do the talking. He cannot confirm or deny the whereabouts of the crew; they are all on a two-week leave, with one week remaining.

However, while snooping about the ship, the manifest can be discovered, containing the last cargo's information. The cargo consisted of botanical samples from a company in Bucharest named Gentek Inc, all packed in the native earth of the area. The final destination of the cargo was listed as the Gentek storage facility in the grounds of Milwaukee Senator Michael Smith's Washington residence. Senator Smith, as is easily discovered, is outspoken on the subject of allowing more genetic research within the USA. He is also a member of the Gentek board. Both Senator Michael Smith and Gentek Inc can be looked up on HERMES to provide some clues.

A roster of crew is available, but it will take some time to work through the full crew list. Vladimir offers to do the job for the investigators and notify them of his results in a day or two. He cannot do it any faster, he says, because "It can take that long to drag one man from a bar, let alone the whole crew!"

Kinder may come across as being quite cagey. However, he is as concerned as anyone about the possibility of one of his crew being a possible murder victim. He will honestly endeavor to find out which crew member has gone missing, and in two days will inform the Cell that the crew is all accounted for, apart from Radostin Popov, who has sailed with the Nikolai on more than a dozen voyages and was one of the unloading team.

Popov is a Bulgarian, who is single and childless. If pressed upon identification, Kinder will admit that Popov was something of a loner and did not take part in the Nikolai crew's legendary drinking expeditions. For that reason, he was often given delivery jobs at the end of voyages, to ensure that goods did arrive as requested. He was to oversee the delivery of several crates to a customer in Washington D.C. Reluctantly, Kinder will admit this is Gentek Inc., but only if convinced that the party are genuine investigators. If they cannot produce the credentials, the players will have to concoct a really convincing argument.

Vladimir Kinder

Str 4	Siz 4
Agl 4	Ref 3
Int 3	Will 3

Skills

Cartography 3 Language: English 1

Sailing 3

Training

Awareness: Sea Conditions
Navigation Swim

Handout 3

HERMES report on Gentek Inc.

+++++++ GENTEK INC. ++++++

Gentek is a research company, specializing in genetic technology (unsurprisingly). The company has no American facilities, but has long petitioned for greater freedom in the rules governing genetic research within the United States.

The company holds two major holdings overseas, in Budapest and Atlanticos, Mexico. A records office is based at the home of Senator Michael Smith in Washington DC.

The company has lodged financial figures with the US Tax Office, registering a turnover of \$30m/year. Records show it has personnel of 480, 300 of which are located in the Budapest office, 10 in Washington, and the remaining 170 based in Mexico.

Handout 4

Hermes report on Senator Michael Smith

+++++++ Senator Michael Smith ++++++

Michael Smith, Senator for Milwaukee

Married, no children

Age: 54

Wife's Name: Alyssa

Born: Athens, Georgia

Educated: DuPont Academy For Young People, DuPont, District of Columbia then Harvard, majoring in political science.

Mr. Smith has held the post of senator for the last 18 years, having been elected on a Republican ticket following the death of the state's previous senator, Jack Marginson, of a heart attack. (NOTE: FBI files show no wrongdoing, CIA files from the time impenetrable to the J. Edgar Hoover effect.)

Smith has long campaigned on behalf of the genetic research industry, and is closely allied to public health interests in that regard. Smith is also on the board of Gentek Inc, an American-owned company that is based overseas due to the stringent rules on genetic research within the US borders.

Smith is an oddity in the Senate in that AEGIS cannot forward any salacious material on the Senator. He does not frequent the local call-girl circuit, and has long been admired by certain quarters for the strongly moral image that he portrays. However, he has never

aspired to becoming presidential material, and perhaps lacks the charisma required for sound bites.

Behind the scenes, he is known as a quiet man, but with a talent for ruthless negotiating when it comes to things that are important to him. Were it to be known, the vote on instituting the current genetic research control measures was very close, and it was only because of some presidential deal-making that Smith's side was defeated. He appears to have taken the defeat in good grace, however, and has shown no signs of recrimination, choosing instead to continue to campaign.

McGillicuddy's Bar

A boozy Irish-American bar, this is a dark, smoky place, even when it is broad daylight outside. The owner is one Jack McGillicuddy, who bears no fools and will refuse to acknowledge that his bar was the center of any illegal activity. He does, however, remember seeing: "A big Russky guy? Yeah I remember him. Well, hell, the whole bar would, given the doll he had on his arm."

When questioned further, McGillicuddy will say that the "doll" was "a stunner, looked like a dancer or somthin'. I mean, she was *beautiful*. And those eyes . . . y'know, I don't know if I'll ever see that lady again, but I hope I do . . . one day."

Anyone else questioned about the bar will say much the same. But everyone who was in that night remembers her, and ends the same way saying they hope they will see her again " . . . one day".

Any greater description than this is hard to come by. Whenever people mention her, they become distracted. She is generally described as a blonde, and quite short, but no details specific enough to form identification can be garnered. Most people around the bar can provide a much more vivid description of the man who left with her. He was definitely a sizeable chap, around 32 years old, Caucasian, brown dirty hair and gray eyes, around six-foot one inches and very muscular.

McGillicuddy says the couple, who weren't too close by appearances, left around midnight -- hey, it was a private party, ok?

Jack McGillicuddy

Str 4	Siz 3
Agl 3	Ref 4
Int 3	Will 4

Skills

Diplomacy 2 Forgery 1 (enough to spot it)
Humanities: Barroom Philosophy 5
Language: Slurred English 5 First Aid 1

Training

Awareness: Empty Glass

The Crime Scene

Roosevelt Avenue is around five minutes' walk from McGillicuddy's Bar, and the crime scene is at the top end of an alleyway running onto the street. The area has been searched by police and there is still police tape hanging from the walls at the end of the street. It has been torn through by now, and life is continuing on. Still, a search of the scene will turn up (with a Df3 Forensics test, or a Df4 Perception test) a scar in the brickwork at the side of the alley. The scar is around three inches deep, running for a foot in length, and would not have been noticed at first because it is in the shadow of a dumpster. Further examination will reveal a short scrap of material . . . just the same as was found on the body (or not, if the players were unable to examine it). Again, handled with bare fingers it will cut a player's hand and will need further examination in a properly equipped lab.

Tracking Down The Watchers

The Watchers is a new gang within the DC area. Finding them is not easy. In fact, if a character cannot call on a criminal contact -- or perhaps a media or police contact -- they will have no chance at all, for now. Even then, it will take a Df3 Influence test to come up with the goods. Still, they may succeed in finding out something. A successful test will provide the following information.

Peculiarly, the Watchers do not appear to have any particular territory, but are more of a nomadic gang, traveling freely through a number of different neighborhoods. As far as anyone knows, there has only been one gang fight involving the Watchers, when the White Sharks tried to take them down. The result -- the White Sharks do not exist any more. Near as anyone can reckon, the Watchers number just a dozen members at most -- and no-one's sure where any of them came from. They just kind of appeared a few months ago. If anyone has any criminal contacts, then they point out one gangland figure, a Boneshaker by the name of Ramirez had a bad experience that he is only too happy to talk about. <address provided, on the other side of DC>

Ramirez

Strung out on more than just dope, Ramirez is wide-eyed and staring. This could easily be written off as simply drugs, but, with any Df1 Psychology or Df4 Perception test, anyone can tell that it is fear that is driving Ramirez, not any kind of chemical.

Ramirez will tell the party that he was just about to mug a tourist at the Washington Monument when, out of nowhere, The Watchers appeared. He started to run...

"But one of 'em caught me. Big guy, breath smelled like honey. Anyhow, he grabs me, lifts me up so's my feet's danglin' and starts shoutin' 'Where is she? Where is she?'. I mean, hell man, I don't know what's going down and I tell him jus' so. But he keeps shoutin'. So here's me, pinned up against the monument and sayin' 'I don' know, I don' know'.

"Then I look round, and I see this woman. Like a dancer. Beautiful, man. Beautiful. Hell, next thing I know it's mornin' and I'm wakin' up cold and shivin' in the park. Cuts all over me, but I's alive. Cuts heal but I still don' know what happened. All I know is that woman had the most beautiful eyes I've ever seen. I don' know if I'll ever see her again, but I hope I do . . . one day."

Ramirez knows nothing more. No matter what methods the players use to extract more information, they will be unsuccessful.

Ramirez

Str 4	Siz 3
Agl 4	Ref 4
Int 3	Will 2

Skills

Athletics 2 Forgery 1
Gambling 2 Lockpicking 1
Melee Weapon: Knife 2 Small Arms: Pistol 1
Stealth 2 Throw 1

Training

Awareness: Police Presence

Senator Michael Smith

Senator Smith will only be too happy to meet anyone to discuss genetic research -- but only at his office on Capitol Hill, not at his private residence. That is located on the outer edge of town, as part of a large personal estate.

Anyone investigating Senator Smith will discover that most of his money was originally inherited, his father and his grandfather having built up a substantial fortune through the railroads. Senator Smith has, in his time, transferred most of that fortune into investment in various scientific ventures. Firstly, his interest was in virus research. Secondly, he invested heavily in anti-toxicological programs. Lately, his interests have turned towards genetics, and his money is heavily invested in Gentek Inc.

Senator Smith speaks quietly, but earnestly, as if every word he says has been carefully weighed and considered. He gets emotional about topics which are close to his heart, but does not express that emotion well . . . more he starts to stutter over words, not one to become a high-flyer in politics.

In meeting the players, Senator Smith will reveal as little as possible about his own involvements, but will happily detail the "restrictive" laws practiced in the US which, in his words, "force honest and sincere genetic research programs abroad to carry on their work in less advanced facilities, thus slowing up their work for years."

Asked why he has such a beef about genetics, Smith will conjure up a suitably political speech about it being the future of the world, and important for the safety of future generations. "How else can we fight genetic diseases if we are forced to carry out research with one hand tied behind our backs?"

If anyone raises the murder with Senator Smith, he will clam up, close up, deny he has any knowledge, and conclude the interview as quickly as possible.

Similarly, if anyone asks what was bound for Senator Smith's estate and the Gentek holding there, he says that is in the hands of the Gentek team based there, and not his concern. He merely lets the land to them for their complex, but he adds that he assumes it is merely items to be documented and forwarded to the Mexican complex. It is not the first time that items have been passed through the estate to be recorded. Smith's statistics are detailed at the end of the adventure.

Chapter Four: Opening The Casket

By this stage, the player's leads should have narrowed down to two distinct areas. One, tracking down the Watchers. Two, investigating the Gentek labs on Senator Smith's estate. Senator Smith's Washington office may also prove an area the players wish to investigate but, even if they should gain entry after hours and search through his files, there is nothing there to incriminate him.

Tracking down the Watchers will prove impossible -- for now. Senator Smith's estate, then, awaits.

The Estate

The Senator's estate is located on the outer edges of Washington, backed up against some low hills. Security, on surveillance, is actually quite high, but is undone by the picturesque location. The slope of the hill running down to the rear wall is such that it is actually reasonably simple to scale the wall at the back. As long as the property is approached at night, that should ensure the characters are not spotted before they are in the grounds.

There are three major buildings within the complex, a guardhouse by the gate, occupied by two security guards, who are generally bored with the humdrum of doing a job where nothing ever happens. The main house is the largest of the buildings within the complex, but on the east side of the area, a long, narrow greenhouse is located, the contents of which cannot be viewed from outside, due to heavy plastic shrouds which have been erected throughout. What can be seen is that 24 hours a day, bright UV lighting is on through the whole building.

The Supernatural

The Senator's estate may not be ideal for security, but it is a Locus of Seepage Level 2 (with 6 Seepage Points). Even non-sensitives get a feeling of being watched or a creepy sensation at the back of their neck. Sensitives get flashes of strange, clawed creatures attacking innocents. The nature of the site is definitely malevolent.

Guards

Two security guards are located in the gatehouse, with two more in an office underneath the main building, in an underground parking area, and four more patrolling the grounds in pairs. These guys are not top end of the range security specialists. A few doughnuts too many have been consumed, and a lot of nights without worrying about any danger of a break-in have done their work. Unless the players are really careless, they should be able to effect entry into any building they wish without fear of being disturbed.

The main building is unlocked. The occupants are either overconfident in their guards' abilities or blithely ignorant of any threat. The greenhouse is a different matter. The place is securely locked and to enter unobtrusively, players will have to match their skills against a lock of Df3 to effect entry. A security camera is also in place inside, but only a bad luck roll will lead to players being spotted.

If a Bad Luck roll comes up, the guards will see "something" and send a couple of guys over to check it out.

Guards

All Stats 3

Skills

Handgun 2 Surveillance 1

The Greenhouse

Entering the greenhouse will lead the players to the cause of the "vampire" attack. Gentek Inc. has its records office in the front of the greenhouse. The greenhouse is active, and it is growing vampires. Only one of the organic vampires has been grown thus far, and she goes by the name of Totemtanz, German for Death Dancer.

Totemtanz killed the sailor who had overseen the delivery of goods to Gentek Inc. Several of the crates lie just beyond the front office, before the main greenhouse area itself. Inside are traces of dirt, which delivery records show contained not just dirt from the Gentek lab in Yugoslavia, but plant bulbs -- samples -- which have been genetically altered.

Inside The Greenhouse

The Greenhouse is a riot of growth and color. Picking their way down the aisles, the players see the lightest growth is at the near end of the building and the densest towards the rear. Venturing further down the rows, the plants become much larger and, at around the halfway point, large pods can be seen around the base of the plants. Soon after, the pods appear to be taking shape. The pods can be seen to be forming definite shapes of hands, feet, arms, faces . . .

At about this point, the players in the greenhouse (they may have separated, after all) hear the door behind them open again. Turning back, they will find a stunningly beautiful woman standing there.

Totemtanz

Str 4 Siz 2
Total Seepage Points Available: 4 (+6 for location)
Agi 5 Ref 4
Int 3 Per 3
Will 4

Powers (from Incarnate information)

Regeneration (Slowed, takes up to one week to completely regenerate self)

Thrall Mesmerism

Attacks: Kick, Punch as normal. Can do a kick-punch-kick move with Martial Arts skill level 3

Ribbons: Attack with skill level 3 and do damage of Wn (Str), can also drain blood entirely from a person in five rounds after a successful Mesmerism, as long as Totemtanz is undisturbed.

Weakness: All fire-based damage suffered by Totemtanz is doubled.

Weedkiller is also surprisingly effective, doing Fw3 damage every time she is hit with a substantial spray of it.

Totemtanz is returning from a night of hunting, and standing behind her, eyes bright with her beauty, is a vagrant. Totemtanz, seeing the players, curses and flicks her wrist in the direction of the vagrant. From her wrist extends a ribbon -- just like the type used by gymnasts -- but this one is deadly. The vagrant's throat slits open and, as the blood begins to gush, Totemtanz pushes his body over onto some of the younger plants.

If only one player has ventured into the greenhouse, she will approach confidently and attempt to mesmerize him. If she succeeds, she will feed from him, draining his blood in five rounds. Give the player the chance to break free of the mesmerism every round.

If Totemtanz is killed, the players can venture further into the greenhouse, where they will find the plants at the very back are almost full-grown, with full figures identical to Totemtanz growing there, but which have not yet detached themselves from the plant. The only way to dispose of these plants permanently is to torch the place. A search of the location will find some fuel drums -- it seems Gentek were prepared in case the vampires became out of control -- and the greenhouse can easily be set light to, although this will provoke a chorus of shrieking from the unborn vampires which will be horrible to the ears.

Consequences

If the players headed for the house first, then they will not yet have experienced the after-effects of destroying the warehouse but if (when) they do, they will find guards rushing to try and put the fire out. A good oil fire will be hard for the guards to put out, but if the players are seen, the guards will open fire at them before tackling the blaze. The number of guards running over will be limited, though. There will only be two. No guards come from the gate area and

none move from the house.

Strangely, there is no sign of any other kind of retribution coming, be it from the house or from any police who should have been called. This may well give the players the chance to enter the house, but either way they tackle the house, before or after the fire, they will find the front door standing open.

Enter The Watchers

Just inside the front door of the house, the players will find two sleeping guards. They are lying on the floor, deep in an unnatural slumber. The bottom floor of the house is deserted, as the players quickly discover, but on the staircase they find the body of one of the members of the Watchers, the gang whose presence in Washington lately is a mystery.

The body is that of a young man, with no visible signs as to what killed him. If his body is moved, it is found to be incredibly light, weighing no more than a stone -- almost as if he was nothing more than a husk.

On the top floor landing, a second body is found, again a Watcher with no visible injuries. The sounds of fighting can be heard from behind a large door off the landing, across from which a third body is pinned to the wall with a steel spike, again a dead Watcher.

Senator Smith's Chamber

The fighting is taking place between the two remaining members of the Watchers and Senator Smith. But Senator Smith is not the man the players met in his office, nor are the Watchers the punk youths that have been previously described.

The room, which appears to be a large laboratory, with a pentagram on a raised dais in the center of the room and numerous computer screens and sensors scattered around, is lit by clashing red and white lights.

The Watchers are both radiating white light, with large pairs of wings emerging from their backs. They look like angels.

Across from them, Senator Smith's now-fiendish face is lit by fiery light, and his hands have metamorphosed into ferocious claws. As the players watch, he slashes the nearest member of the Watchers, who is hurled backwards with a ragged slash across his stomach. He lands and does not move. At the same time, the remaining member slashes the Senator's side with a short blade. Barely reacting, the Senator plants a hefty kick into the Watcher's midriff and sends him flying back into the bank of computers with a loud crash. Turning to the players, the Senator's devilish face snarls, and spits out "What do you want?"

Senator Michael Smith

Str 5 Siz 3

Total Seepage Points Available: 5 (ordinarily 4 + 6 for location, but reduced by his exertions against the Watchers)

Agi 4 Ref 4

Int 3 Will 4

Per 3

Powers

Frenzy

Mask (which he uses to maintain his appearance as a normal human in everyday life)

Mesmerism

Regeneration

Levitation
Teleportation

Attacks: Martial Arts 3, a variety of minor moves as the GM sees fit, plus a selection of two move combos such as kick-punch, grab-throw, dodge-block, etc. Claws do Wn(Str-1) damage, skill of 3.

Senator Smith is older than he looks. Back around the early part of the 20th century, a young Michael Smith was a biologist dabbling in the occult. Magic was something that he found came easily to him, and he was soon on the path to becoming an Incarnate: Devil. He never lost his interests in science and, enjoying the financial benefits his powers were bringing him, he started to fund a variety of projects. His current project is one he has been keen on ever since the discovery of the DNA sequence. He believes he can grow an army which he can use to back any move for power he cares to make, either blatantly, or subtly by using the Totemtanz creature's seductive powers on the right figures in power. He does not want to risk this goal by a fight with the players, and will use 3SP to try and make his escape.

To get away, he must spend three turns inside the pentagram, although he can still engage players in combat during this time. He will try and put the players down rather than kill them, just looking to buy himself time to get away. To stop him, the players must either get him out of the pentagram, which is around eight feet across, or kill him. Wounding him will not stop him; he will ignore the wounds knowing he can heal himself at his destination, which is his residence in Milwaukee.

There are only two outcomes here. Either the investigators kill the Senator, or he gets away. He is not going to be around long enough to kill the heroes.

Chapter Five: Aftermath

Assuming the players are still alive, they can check the remaining bodies of the Watchers. The one with the slashed stomach is dead. The remaining one has disappeared, leaving a few feathers behind. None of the other bodies now have wings, and all are incredibly light.

If there has been a fire, then emergency services will be along in another ten minutes or so, leaving the players little time to pick themselves up and make their escape.

The sleeping security guards come round with no memory of what has taken place, while the Senator, if he has escaped, will remain an opponent for another day.

* * *

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Designer's Notes: Proteus

by Francis K. Lalumiere

"And Proteus began at once with his old tricks, first changing himself into a lion with a great mane. Then suddenly he became a dragon, a leopard, a wild boar; the next moment he turned into running water, and then, finally, he was a tree."

--Homer, *The Odyssey*, Book IV

I designed the basic mechanics of *Proteus* while waiting in line for the *Back to the Future* ride at Universal Studios, in California.

Seriously.

For some time I had been toying with the idea of playing a game with dice for pieces and the rules of chess for movement, but I had never sat down to figure out how such a game might actually work. I don't really like chess; I find the frame of the game too restrictive (and I don't mean the edges of the chessboard, here), but I'm fascinated by the movement possibilities of chess pieces. As a result, I oftentimes contemplate chess, but I rarely play it. I had tried my share of chess variants, but somehow I felt that my "dice chess" idea would create something interestingly different. If I could only figure out how to play the game.

Things stayed pretty much status quo for about two years. My subconscious might have been polishing up some concepts, but I didn't consciously work on the game until I found myself stuck in line at Universal Studios. I'll try to make a long story short . . . I was alone in Los Angeles on business, and I found myself with a free afternoon -- the temptation of the Universal Studios demon was too great to resist. So I went. At some point I ended up trapped in line at the *Back to the Future* ride, and since I had no one to talk to and hadn't brought a book (water rides oblige), I thought it might be worth my while to start laying down the foundations for my dice-chess game. In any case, it would be a lot more productive than staring at the Hawaiian shirt in front of me for an hour. By the time I got on the ride, I already had a very good idea of the inner workings of the game. And when I stepped out of my rigged Delorean (great ride, by the way), I couldn't wait to get back to my hotel room and write everything down. I used the rest of my in-line waiting sessions to run a few mental tests and do some basic math.

At the end of the day, I drove back to the hotel with my head full of sketches and design notes. I knew that my game, like chess, would be a two-player game and that players would alternate turns (I know this sounds very basic, but at some point you do need to give that stuff consideration). I also knew that each player would start with eight dice, that the dice would show a different chess piece on each face, that the goal of the game involved capturing several pieces (as opposed to neutralizing *one* particular target), and that a player would perform two actions on his turn: move a die and rotate a die (to change the identity of that piece) one step at a time. Most importantly (hey, we all have our fixations), I also had a name for the game -- Proteus, the Greek god of ever-changing form.

I thought I would stay up all night but, much to my surprise, I was content with simply jotting down what I had devised during the day and going to bed. All right, I'll be honest; I had some problems falling asleep. Morpheus was always bumped by Proteus who thought some of his needs still had to be addressed.

And he was right.

First of all, I didn't know how you were supposed to win the game. I had a vague notion related to taking out as many of the opposing pieces as possible, but somehow that felt wrong. Also, I still hadn't found a balancing mechanism that would prevent powermongers from rotating all of their dice up to queens. There was one most delicate matter: I didn't know what to do with the king. Since I was dedicated to the disappearance of the checkmate concept from *Proteus*, was it still worth it to keep the king in there?

I eventually managed to fall asleep, without having resolved anything. I did try to refine and complement my notes on

the flight back, the next morning, but somehow I didn't make much progress until I got home. Then, in one evening, I solved practically all of my problems.

For the sequence in which the chess pieces would appear on the faces of the die, I chose to adhere to the traditional chess value sequence, with one exception: I placed the bishop in front of the knight, because I felt it would open up the game faster. That gave me pawn, bishop, knight, rook and queen. Still no idea about the king. However, it became obvious pretty quickly that a player would have to move a die and then rotate a *different* die; infiltrating the enemy camp as a bishop and immediately transforming into a knight smelled of overpowered tactics. Interestingly enough, the questions of game balance and victory conditions were solved at the same time, and with the same gimmick. Back then I was playing the game with standard six-sided dice, remembering that the 6 was the queen, 5 the rook, 4 the knight, 3 the bishop and 2 the pawn (1 could be the king, but I felt queasy about that). I thought it might be fun to win a game of *Proteus* by having the most points, with each piece being worth a certain number of points. In assigning point values to the pieces -- with my endless originality, I chose the number of dots that represented each piece -- I discovered that such a scheme would automatically balance the game, because the stronger pieces were worth more points when they were captured by the opponent. I had done it!

Or so I thought.

I moved on to the problem of the king. Since a game of *Proteus* was won by having the most points, there was little incentive to keep the king in the game. Without his vital quality, the rules of movement make the king into a limping queen, and that's nowhere near appealing given the morphing nature of game pieces in *Proteus*. Plus, where would the king fit in the die sequence? I could simply have thrown the king away, but here was an opportunity to inject another new concept into the game. So instead of eliminating the king, I would replace it. After considering different ideas for a while, I chose the simplest one: the new piece would not move at all, but would also be impossible to take. I named that piece the fortress.

With these problems apparently resolved, I could sit down and play a few "real" games against myself. Everything was going rather smoothly. The game was simple, played fast, yet retained its possibilities for deep strategy. And then I hit a brick wall with an evening dress and a crown.

The queen.

Because of the mathematical progression of the value of pieces, and because of the similar progression of their respective powers, the game was exquisitely balanced -- except for the queen. The problem laid in the power of the queen being much greater than its point value. Between a rook and a queen, the difference in power is immense; yet the different in point value was only one. That couldn't work. One solution was to raise the point value of the queen. But that didn't appeal to me because it implied assigning the queen some ridiculous value, say, 12 points. This meant that a player capturing a queen would probably win, and I wanted to avoid that like the plague. I therefore chose the only alternative, which was to make the queen less powerful. But instead of toying around with its movement and capturing rules, I thought it better to curse the queen with a weakness. I had the idea of making the square directly behind the queen vulnerable to attacks (much in the same way the queen herself can be taken on her square), but I couldn't help feeling that the right solution couldn't be that easy, or that elegant: one could capture the queen by stepping on her gown. So I played some more games and, surprisingly, the queen seemed to behave. I was delighted with the fortress, and overall *Proteus* worked. It was time to take the game out for a spin.

I took *Proteus* to the local game store where I always went, and a couple of friends expressed interest in the game. We played over and over again, and I kept thinking that some obvious flaw would blow up in my face; but no such thing happened. Back home, I put *Proteus* to the test with a few more friends, and the game still held up. We did try to increase the number of pieces each player starts with (up to 12), but we only succeeded in creating quite a mess of a traffic jam, with games that would take more than an hour. And I was determined to keep play time to 30 minutes or less. We also experimented with fewer pieces for each player, but the game quickly became boring and predictable. Eight seemed to be just the right choice.

At that time I had just finished translating both *Illuminati* and *Tile Chess* into French for Steve Jackson Games, so it was an easy matter for me to tell Steve -- between emails, as it were -- about *Proteus*. He was immediately interested,

asking for only one change: that the fortress become the pyramid. I should have thought about that myself. And before I knew it, my game was on the list of upcoming Steve Jackson Games titles.

Then I started to worry.

You see, I hadn't really planned on selling *Proteus* to anyone; I was really just playing around with the game for my own enjoyment. But now it was going to be out there, and I realized it had to be as good as I could make it. While I didn't think anything needed to be changed in the game itself, I thought the door was wide open for a series of intriguing variations on the basic rules.

So I set out to have *Proteus* itself morph into half a dozen different forms, much like its components could do on the battlefield. I designed a handful of variants and thoroughly tested them all with my (very patient) wife Stephanie. Four of them ended up in the finished game: Trade-Off, Russian Roulette, Wall Street, and Polarity. That's five if you count the two different setups for Wall Street. Steve suggested an additional variant, which we ended up calling Warhorses -- for a total of six variants. But where did the other ones go? Right here.

Random Setup

This was the shortest-lived of the variants I came up with. Rolling your dice to see what pieces you would start with was the dumbest idea this side of the sun, and it only survived for about half a setup phase -- I realized pretty quickly there was no way I could make this work. Still, the concept of rolling pieces (because they *are* dice, after all) fascinated me, and that eventually became the Russian Roulette variant.

Pyramid

The idea here was that pieces could only capture opposing pieces that were of equal or higher value. So a pawn could capture everything (except the pyramid, but that's a given), and a queen could only capture other queens. (Can you see the pyramid pattern? You're quick.) This didn't work because no player wanted to upgrade to stronger pieces. So what if you have a knight? I'll just stay with bishops and the only thing you'll catch is a cold.

I tried playing the Inverted Pyramid (capture downwards) but it only succeeded in destroying the effectiveness of the weaker pieces and handing a flak jacket to the stronger ones.

Pyramid didn't evolve into anything else; it got buried in the back yard.

Black & White

Whenever you capture a piece, its point value is the standard one if it was captured on a black square, but is whatever's on the bottom face (or 7 minus top face) if it was captured on a white square.

Pretty inventive, right? This is one I actually sent to Steve, but in the end it was not included with the rest because it didn't really add all that much to the strategy. Plus, the configuration of the Proteus dice would be different from that of regular six-siders in order to facilitate the upgrade/downgrade procedure, and that would throw the point balance out of whack.

There were other variant possibilities, but most of them involved a complicated set of special rules, and I didn't want to burden *Proteus* with unnecessary weight. There was only one problem left to solve, and that involved my asking Steve for a favor: I wanted to dedicate the game to one of my oldest friends, whom I've known since we were both nine years old (I was 28 last time I checked), and with whom I've shared a universe of close games, hot matches, and gaming disputes. I gave Steve two versions of the dedication, and they ended up going with the short one. Here's how the longest one read:

"This game is dedicated to my dear friend Alexandre "Le Brown" Boivin, who started bugging me about designing my own game 12 years ago and who hasn't stopped since. I'm as happy to see my first game published as I am to finally shut him up. :)"

Unfortunately, we ran out of space.

And speaking of running out of space, here's a fun little variant suggested by Steve right after he played his first game of Proteus. It didn't make it on the rulesheet, but since there's no limit on electrons (yet), here we go:

Dictatorship

This is played with regular chess pieces and two Proteus dice. Each turn, roll the two dice. You must move one of the two pieces showing on your dice (pyramid=king). If you can't make a legal move with one of the indicated pieces, you don't move.

If this is too hard, roll three dice to give yourself more options. Or play with a handicap: the stronger player gets only two dice, and the weaker player gets three.

Should you develop your own *Proteus* variants, I would be delighted to see them! Feel free to email them to me at promeneur_solitaire@yahoo.com. We might even compile the best ones and post them on the official *Proteus* homepage, at <http://www.sjgames.com/proteus/>.

My next game? I do have an idea in the back of my head. I'm trying to arrange a trip to Bush Gardens to sort it out.

Leonardi "The Mechanic"

by James L. Cambias

ST: 10 [0] **DX:** 14 [45] **IQ:** 13 [30] **HT:** 10 [0]

Move: 6 Speed: 6

Dodge: 7 Parry: 9 (Mace), 11 (Brawling), 8 (Knife)

Age 30; 5'9"; 140 lbs.; a slim, olive-skinned man with a shaved head and light brown eyes, dressed in carefully-mended leather armor when he's conducting a burglary, otherwise in craftsman's clothing.

Advantages Combat Reflexes [15], Composed [5], Literacy [5].

Disadvantages Bloodlust [-10], Greed [-15], Secret (Actually a thief) [-20], Unattractive [-5].

Quirks: Careful, Goes by last name only, Irreligious, Likes to make detailed plans, Proud. [-5]

Skills: Acting-12 [1], Axe/Mace-16 [8], Blacksmith/TL3-12 [1], Brawling-15 [2], Climbing-16 [8], Crossbow-16* [4], Holdout-12 [1], Jeweler/TL3-13 [4], Knife-14 [1], Lockpicking-16 [8], Mechanic/TL3 (Clockwork and small gadgets)-14 [4], Merchant-12 [1], Poisons-12 [2], Stealth-16 [8], Streetwise-12 [1], Traps-16 [6].

*Includes bonus for IQ 12+.

Equipment: Leonardi likes to have the right tools at hand for whatever job he's working on. In the field, he wears leather armor, a black mask if he might be recognized, and covers it all with a cheap cloak and hat. He goes armed with a crossbow (a repeating one if they are available), keeps a dagger in his boot, and uses a crowbar both as a tool and a mace in combat. Leonardi carries a complete set of top-quality lockpicks, rope, a mirror and magnifying glass for seeing into locks and traps, and a dark lantern.

Total Points: 100

History

Filippo Leonardi is a thief with long-term plans for himself. His mother was the cook in the home of a master goldsmith, who never acknowledged the boy as his. Young Filippo showed a great aptitude for metalwork and building machines, but couldn't find any craftsmen willing to take him as an apprentice. There was someone who saw potential in Filippo's talents, though: a thief named Tremonte talked young Leonardi into joining him, and the two managed several successful burglaries.

But Tremonte was caught and hanged when he tried to sell a distinctive jewelled goblet the two had filched. Leonardi got away, but learned a valuable lesson. He saw that a thief, no matter how skilled, would always be a social outcast. To become truly successful, Leonardi would have to become respectable.

Leonardi carried out some daring and profitable robberies, then approached a struggling silversmith in a remote provincial town. In exchange for a huge bribe, the smith agreed to skip the usual term of apprenticeship, and certified Leonardi as a master craftsman. Master Leonardi set up a small shop in a bustling city, to all appearances a successful young clockmaker and silversmith.

His success isn't due to his skill as a metalworker. He does adequate work, and can create ingenious clockwork gadgets. But the real secret of Leonardi's business success is low overhead: all the silver and gold he uses is stolen. By night, Leonardi conducts carefully-planned robberies of wealthy households (often houses he has visited plying his daytime trade). The loot gets melted down in his workshop and transformed into items which he sells at a very

competitive price.

Motivations

Leonardi has two main goals in life. The first is to increase his wealth and standing in the community. He hopes someday to hire his own apprentices, both promising young metalworkers and skilled thieves. Then Leonardi can quit doing his own work entirely . . . the thieves will get loot for him, the apprentice smiths will turn it into merchandise, and Mr. Leonardi can live comfortably as a leading citizen, respected by all.

His second goal is to protect the secret of his double life. Leonardi has a ruthless streak, and is perfectly willing to kill anyone who might expose him or interfere with his plans.

Encountered

Leonardi can be encountered at any point in his career, as an ally, a contact, a patron, or an enemy. It's especially interesting if he starts as one and winds up in quite another role.

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Once he's established himself as a respectable craftsman, Leonardi can be a valuable contact. He's well-connected in both the city's business circles and its underworld, and can provide lots of useful information. His mechanical skills and inventiveness also make him a good supplier of unique weapons and custom-built gadgets. In a somewhat more cinematic campaign, Leonardi could be the "Q Division" for a group of adventurers (in which case he should have the Gadgeteer advantage). Though he's officially retired, he might be willing to tackle one last job if the rewards were big enough.

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Other Times and Places

Leonardi can turn up in almost any game world. He works best in worlds with large cities and at least a Roman Empire level of technology. In later periods he certainly will prefer black powder weapons or modern guns to his crossbow. After about 1950 or so, "Phil the Mechanic" replaces Blacksmith and Holdout with Security Systems and Forgery. With the Gadgeteer advantage, more Wealth and a bigger Ally Group, the shadowy Mechanic can be a good adversary for pulp crimebusters or Golden Age-style superheroes. Turn his Crossbow into Beam Weapons (either laser or blaster) for a futuristic or cyberpunk Leonardi.

Leonardi "The Mechanic"

by James L. Cambias

ST: 10 [0] **DX:** 14 [45] **IQ:** 13 [30] **HT:** 10 [0]

Move: 6 Speed: 6

Dodge: 7 Parry: 9 (Mace), 11 (Brawling), 8 (Knife)

Age 30; 5'9"; 140 lbs.; a slim, olive-skinned man with a shaved head and light brown eyes, dressed in carefully-mended leather armor when he's conducting a burglary, otherwise in craftsman's clothing.

Advantages Combat Reflexes [15], Composed [5], Literacy [5].

Disadvantages Bloodlust [-10], Greed [-15], Secret (Actually a thief) [-20], Unattractive [-5].

Quirks: Careful, Goes by last name only, Irreligious, Likes to make detailed plans, Proud. [-5]

Skills: Acting-12 [1], Axe/Mace-16 [8], Blacksmith/TL3-12 [1], Brawling-15 [2], Climbing-16 [8], Crossbow-16* [4], Holdout-12 [1], Jeweler/TL3-13 [4], Knife-14 [1], Lockpicking-16 [8], Mechanic/TL3 (Clockwork and small gadgets)-14 [4], Merchant-12 [1], Poisons-12 [2], Stealth-16 [8], Streetwise-12 [1], Traps-16 [6].

*Includes bonus for IQ 12+.

Equipment: Leonardi likes to have the right tools at hand for whatever job he's working on. In the field, he wears leather armor, a black mask if he might be recognized, and covers it all with a cheap cloak and hat. He goes armed with a crossbow (a repeating one if they are available), keeps a dagger in his boot, and uses a crowbar both as a tool and a mace in combat. Leonardi carries a complete set of top-quality lockpicks, rope, a mirror and magnifying glass for seeing into locks and traps, and a dark lantern.

Total Points: 100

History

Filippo Leonardi is a thief with long-term plans for himself. His mother was the cook in the home of a master goldsmith, who never acknowledged the boy as his. Young Filippo showed a great aptitude for metalwork and building machines, but couldn't find any craftsmen willing to take him as an apprentice. There was someone who saw potential in Filippo's talents, though: a thief named Tremonte talked young Leonardi into joining him, and the two managed several successful burglaries.

But Tremonte was caught and hanged when he tried to sell a distinctive jewelled goblet the two had filched. Leonardi got away, but learned a valuable lesson. He saw that a thief, no matter how skilled, would always be a social outcast. To become truly successful, Leonardi would have to become respectable.

Leonardi carried out some daring and profitable robberies, then approached a struggling silversmith in a remote provincial town. In exchange for a huge bribe, the smith agreed to skip the usual term of apprenticeship, and certified Leonardi as a master craftsman. Master Leonardi set up a small shop in a bustling city, to all appearances a successful young clockmaker and silversmith.

His success isn't due to his skill as a metalworker. He does adequate work, and can create ingenious clockwork gadgets. But the real secret of Leonardi's business success is low overhead: all the silver and gold he uses is stolen. By night, Leonardi conducts carefully-planned robberies of wealthy households (often houses he has visited plying his daytime trade). The loot gets melted down in his workshop and transformed into items which he sells at a very

competitive price.

Motivations

Leonardi has two main goals in life. The first is to increase his wealth and standing in the community. He hopes someday to hire his own apprentices, both promising young metalworkers and skilled thieves. Then Leonardi can quit doing his own work entirely . . . the thieves will get loot for him, the apprentice smiths will turn it into merchandise, and Mr. Leonardi can live comfortably as a leading citizen, respected by all.

His second goal is to protect the secret of his double life. Leonardi has a ruthless streak, and is perfectly willing to kill anyone who might expose him or interfere with his plans.

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Pyramid Review

Maiden Voyage (for d20)

Published by [Atlas Games](#)

Written by Chad Brouillard

Illustrated by David Interdonato, Scott Reeves & Steven Saunders

40 duo-tone pages; \$9.95

Maiden Voyage is the fifth adventure in Atlas Games' Penumbra line of *d20* books. As the title suggests, it concerns a sailing trip, a subject common to many fantasy scenarios and seen most recently in the *Adventure Keep* series from AEG and the *Instant Lairs & Adventures* series from Fantasy Flight Games. In examining *Maiden Voyage*, an adventure designed for first to third level characters, we will of course be comparing it with these other adventures and other Penumbra titles.

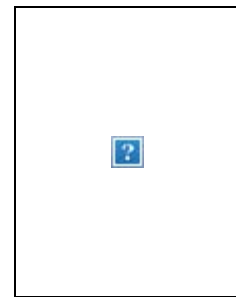
Behind the pleasing David Interdonato cover, *Maiden Voyage* is an attractive looking book. Whereas previous Penumbra titles have used sepia, green or grey in their two colour interiors, this one, in keeping with its theme, opts for a deep, stormy blue. As with other *d20* books, the Penumbra line clearly marks its Open Game License content by placing it into boxes. With *Maiden Voyage*, Atlas Games goes one step further and puts a sea grey background behind the contents of the Open Game License content boxes. While attractive to look at, this has the unfortunate affect that -- when combined with a reduced text size -- makes this content very difficult to read. Indeed, I had to hold *Maiden Voyage* rather close to my eyes; even then I had to strain myself to read the text. Any referee wanting to run this adventure is going to find that actually using this information during play far more disruptive to the flow of the game, when it should have been useful.

[SPOILER ALERT!]

Maiden Voyage is designed to be run as part of almost any campaign. It details a sea voyage between two distant ports, with the characters serving as extra security aboard the good ship, the Albers. Unfortunately the trip is a doomed one, or at least potentially so. Once every thirty years, the long forgotten and malign sea god, Krakas, Lord of the Maelstrom, brings about a curse following a rare eclipse and blood red moon. A lost vessel rises from the depths and sends its undead crew to board a nearby ship. These are the Sea Scourges, servants of Krakas, who seek to board the other ship, kill the crew, and have them take their place in the depths for another thirty years. Thus the Sea Scourges can escape from their oblivion. As the eclipse takes place and the moon reddens, it is the Albers that the Sea Scourges have in their sights.

At the beginning of the adventure, neither the crew nor the players are aware of the dangers to come. Yet life aboard is far from happy. Sailors are a superstitious lot and the presence of a woman aboard -- the captain's companion -- leaves them uneasy. In addition, the ship is carrying a prisoner bound for their destination, where he will be arrested for crimes unmentionable. Vincenz has been placed in an alchemically induced sleep for the entire trip, but should he awake (which surely won't happen, will it?), he is sure to take advantage of the crew's growing fear and paranoia.

As with the previous Penumbra title, *In The Belly Of The Beast*, this adventure is set within an enclosed environment. Primarily the story is driven by events rather than by situation; to support this, it would have been nice if a timetable had been included to help the referee run *Maiden Voyage*, but none is provided. There is some advice upon how to handle the crew and NPCs, but this adventure is clearly not intended for the novice referee to run as their first scenario. It presents a fair mix of roleplaying -- through interaction with the ship's crew as events aboard make them



increasingly fractious -- and combat, as the final encounters has the Sea Scourges come to claim the Albers.

To support *Maiden Voyage*, the referee is provided with full details of the god, Krakas, and a new monster template that can be applied to those who become Sea Scourges. This information can easily be used beyond the confines of this adventure. Indeed, if the party prevent the Sea Scourges from taking the ship, then the cycle of the curse is broken and they will have earned the ire of the malign sea god, Krakas.

There have been plenty of entries in the sea voyage adventure category for *Dungeons & Dragons* and *d20*, but this is a surprisingly good example. With careful handling, *Maiden Voyage* is a refrigerator full of chilling atmosphere that just calls for the referee to dim the lights, put out the candles, and slip on a CD of suitable music turned down low. *Maiden Voyage* is also flexible as to what game system you run it under. Certainly the god Krakas could easily be slipped into other settings or even replaced by a similar deity from such settings. For example, in the Old World of *Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay*, Krakas could be replaced by Stromfels, Lord of Predators, from *Marienburg: Sold Down The River*. Despite being for low-level characters, the closed environment of *Maiden Voyage* makes it easier than many other scenarios to scale to characters of higher levels.

[END SPOILER ALERT]

As far as comparisons go with other Penumbra scenarios, *Maiden Voyage* is perhaps not quite as good as the more recent releases *In The Belly Of The Beast* and *The Tide Of Years*. Yet it is a good scenario in itself and represents one of the better sea set adventures available.

--Matthew Pook (with thanks to Roj at Waylands Forge)

Pyramid Review

The Last Exodus RPG

Published by [Synister Creative Systems](#)

Written by Rev. Sean Jaffe with Joshua "Pidge" Jaffe, T.S. Luikart, Spencer Lease, and Dan McAuliffe

Edited by Gareth-Michael Skarka

Art Direction by Frank B. Fallon and Peter Johnson

196 pages; \$15.00

The Last Exodus is a new game from Synister Creative Systems, publishers of the Underworld RPG. Last Exodus is a biblically-based (among other sources) Rapture/Final Judgment setting, similar to other games such as *Armageddon* and *The End*, detailing the final days of the world, and the agents of Heaven and Hell that are locked in battle over the final outcome.

While similar to other apocalyptic settings, *Last Exodus* gets points for a cosmology that clearly draws from several different mythologies and belief systems, most notably Judeo-Christian theology, Zoroastrianism, and a smattering of Eastern philosophies. While it sometimes feels a little *too* inclusive -- all of the usual (Greek, Norse, etc.) ancient pantheons are shoehorned in, along with the undead, fae creatures and aliens as well -- it's nice to see an apocalyptic RPG inspired by more than just one book of the Bible.

Unfortunately, this is also one of the weak spots in *Last Exodus*. There is background -- lots of background. Heaping buckets of it. While the basic concepts are simple enough, there are so many details about people, factions, and locations that an initial read-through can be a bit disorienting. It's so full of people, places, and things that it sometimes reads like a collection of notes from the authors' personal campaign. While a rich setting is always preferable to one without detail, the way the book is laid out could make comprehension difficult at times, with each chapter introducing more facts without creating a world that the reader can wrap his or her mind around. It's always difficult to create a world, and even more so to communicate that world to others.

Without getting too deep into background, there are two factions (not surprisingly), one serving Ahura Mazda (God) and one backing Ahriman (Satan). A nice touch is that Ahriman (also known as the Godhead) was created by angels as part of a scheme to re-create Ahura Mazda when it seemed that he was no longer in touch with his chosen. As a result, all evil done in the name of God can actually be attributed to Ahriman acting as a twisted parody of the true God. Another nice touch is the link between Earth and Eden (the physical representation of both Heaven and Hell). Eden is linked physically to Earth, so stretches of the planet correspond to heavenly territories and vice versa. Apparently the Luxor hotel in Las Vegas is a direct gate to hellish territory . . . not surprising, considering that it's a giant black pyramid in the desert that shoots a tremendous beam of white light into the night sky.

The overall visual style and presentation of the book is quite good, especially for Synister's sophomore effort. In addition to a striking full color photo cover (which was originally more risqué -- that is, until retailers objected) the interior of the book is all glossy stock with a striking layout appropriate to the modern sensibility of the game. Interior art ranges from excellent to barely passable, and while good when taken as a whole, it ranges wildly in tone from gritty urban realism to cartoonish anime. The varying tone of the art direction sometimes makes the atmosphere of the game

seem unclear; is it a "dark and gritty" setting, or a "high adventure" one? Or both? Tone is critically important to gaming, and nothing sets it like interior illustration.

The rules system follows the "rules light" trend in game design, with one twist being that random numbers are determined by pulls from a deck of cards, rather than dice. Success determination comes down to the oft-used system of a statistic plus a skill (if applicable) and a random number being added to determine a final success number which is then compared against a set difficulty. Character generation is a point-based affair with an advantage and disadvantage system. One nice touch here is that a player takes positive and negative traits for both their form on Earth and their form in the Eden realm. Disadvantages for the character's form in one realm give bonus points to the opposite form, and vice-versa.

Last Exodus takes an everything-and-the-kitchen-sink approach to its setting; plots are big, characters are capital "H" heroes, and the fate of mankind and its chance to move to a higher realm are all at stake in the game's metaplot. While not necessarily breaking all that much new ground, it is refreshing to see a game that attempts to tackle serious issues without getting bogged down in some of the morose concepts that have hamstrung other "post-modern" game worlds. The game is clearly influenced by the authors' desire to improve the world around them (as attested by their postscripts), and it's refreshing to see a setting that doesn't confuse coolness with callousness.

At fifteen dollars, *Last Exodus* is an excellent value considering that it is almost two hundred pages, larger than the average game book and full glossy stock. It's worth picking up either to serve as a full campaign setting, or simply for the wealth of ideas that are crammed between its covers.

--Wridar

Reality (And Other Dangers Of Modern Living)

Last week two things happened.

- I ran an article set (ostensibly) in Washington, D.C. A couple of readers who were Washington, D.C. residents commented that they were disappointed the setting didn't accurately reflect the locale (street names that don't exist and the like).
- I ran an article dealing with the weight of gold coins, which was wildly inaccurate in some of its premises, to say the least. Sorry, all. I'd love to blame it on the fact that lately I've been headachy, overworked, and out of sorts since the events of September 11th. But I missed some basic stuff there, it was all my fault, and you certainly don't want to deal with *my* Lewis Carrollian grasp on reality if we ever meet in reality. Hopefully, in spite of the errors, some of you saw a neat idea or two you can steal for your own campaign (like medieval checking accounts). But, like I said, I'm sorry.

(I also tend to apologize when I think I'm wrong. Lots of women like that. I also *don't* apologize when I don't think I'm wrong. Lots of women don't like that.)

Which leads me to my topic today. (No, not women.) Namely, why I find it nearly impossible to run any game set in modern day, or near-science fiction (at least of the "hard" variety).

In any modern or near-modern setting, the GM and players are (in essence) simulating reality. Anything a character wants to do that's "mundane" is expected to operate roughly as the *player* thinks it would. Unfortunately, in a group with multiple players, they are probably going to have more collected mundane experience than the GM does individually. And, really, there are a million trivial details that (depending on how much your players care about such things) can take them out of the game. Here are just a few I've run into in my experiences:

- The heroes want to take a cab from the airport in Atlanta to downtown. How long does it take to get there?
- How long does it take for police to respond to the scene of a crime? How long does it take to get a search warrant? What can a search warrant cover?
- Can cell phones be traced? If so, how long does it take?
- How much damage can your standard CD-ROM take? How readable is "partial" data from a damaged CD-ROM?
- What effect does electrical damage have on the human body? Does it matter if it's AC or DC?
- How many people are likely to be at a standard hockey game? How long does a standard hockey game last?
- How long does it take radio signals to get to and from Jupiter?

And so on. (And I'm not even counting the times I've had problems with *non*-players, like the heated argument I got with my physicist friend over the impossibility of my gadgeteer NPC's infra-red contact lenses.)

Of course, such challenges in maintaining realism exist in other historical campaigns, too. I shudder to think how many hours were spent in our *Dark Ages* campaign trying to determine how many days' travel it was by horse/boat/foot from London to every other city in England and Wales. But given how many details there are to keep track of in a standard modern game, I generally find the challenges overwhelming. It's much easier to keep everyone equally in the dark in, say, a generic fantasy world ("Umm . . . it's like Europe-ish, sometime between 800 and 1400 A.D.") or space opera ("Travel between worlds is dramatically fuzzy, there are laser blasters, sentient computers, and audible explosions in space."). After all, in a hazy generic fantasy world you can say something like, "The nation of Zhool has but one law: Trial by chickens!" and the plot may progress. But "trial by chickens" isn't valid in 49 states and most nations, so you'll need to know something logical to say if your heroes run <pun>afoul</pun> of the law.

(As an aside, when my friend Kathryn was GMing *In Nomine* for us, she managed to create a challenge for my hacker character, despite not knowing too much about computers. She basically detailed a "denial of service" attack against my character's computer interests . . . about six months before the first DOS attack made the news. Hmm . . . I wonder if she has an alibi?)

(As another aside, by far the most difficult campaign I've ever tried to run was the *Torg* game from a few years ago. I set it in 1990, the year the game originally began. Unfortunately, no one could keep straight what was and wasn't possible in 1990. How common were CDs? CD-ROMs? Cell phones? SUVs? DNA testing? What was the geo-political state in 1990? And so on. I suspect the difficulties in keeping those facts straight would have eventually proven difficult, if I hadn't horribly destroyed the campaign beforehand through my own stupidity.)

Of course, there *are* some methods to help -- or at least mitigate -- the problems of a modern game. And I'll discuss some of those that I've found in the next week or two.

--*Steven Marsh*

* * *

*Last week's answer: **The World of Bloodshadows**, back cover.*

(Three stars)

Film: Musical! The Musical!

Scene 5: This Song's about a Different Song!"

Pyramid Pick

Exalted RPG



Published by [White Wolf Game Studio](#)

Developed by Robert Hatch and Geoffrey C. Grabowski

352 pages; \$29.95

First things first:

Exalted has many types and factions of beings that are called Exalted.

In *Exalted*, you play one of the Solar Exalted.

This fact is vital and so trivial, but *not* knowing that makes reading the first 95 pages or so *very* difficult. Unlike previous White Wolf games, where you know going into it that you'll be playing a vampire, werewolf, or mage -- complete with some preconceived notions of what those types of beings do -- you go into *Exalted* not having the foggiest idea what the Exalted are. And while they do a good job explaining all the various types of Exalted, they don't specifically tell you until page 96 that you are playing one of the Solar Exalted . . . especially if you're reading the Limited Edition without the back cover blurb that makes this point a bit clearer.

So now you know. May the first 95 pages go easier.

Exalted is White Wolf's new roleplaying game set in the Second Age, the time after the golden era of the First Age but before the (potential) future of the World of Darkness.

It is a time of chaos. The Scarlet Empress -- the powerful woman who ruled The Realm for almost 800 years -- disappeared five years ago. The Realm now seems to be collapsing, with petty squabbling among noble houses -- ruled by Dragon-Blooded Exalted -- distracting each other while their society seems in danger of collapsing around them.

It is a time of danger. The lands are beset by all manner of strife: the walking dead, barbarians, the fae, various other Exalted, and the growing potential and turmoil of civil war are all possibilities.

It is a time of heroes. The Solar Exalted (remember them?), after having been more or less eliminated centuries ago, are now returning in numbers. And with these most powerful of Exalted come the possibility of changing the world . . . for good or ill.

Exalted is an epic fantasy game. This is not a game of the band of mercenaries wandering through a dungeon, killing orcs and counting gold pieces. This is a game where the camera zooms out, and there is an enemy army, 500 men deep, waiting for the heroes on the other side of the ridge.

Exalted draws much of its inspiration from Eastern themes and myth cycles, as well as western books and anime. It seems to be, at its core, a high-action game; to put it in perspective, while its bibliography lists *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* as an inspiration, it calls it ". . . long on dialogue and somewhat short on action." This certainly doesn't mean *Exalted* can't be used for character-driven adventures. But the scope of the game makes it likely that such chronicles will be sweeping and grandiose; think *Star Wars*.

Even the map of *Exalted* is both epic and Asian. The world seems to be flat, with poles corresponding to the five elements: Water (west), Air (north), Wood (east), Fire (south), and Earth (the center). The central island of the world is

The Realm, the remaining secure stronghold of the bureaucratic empire founded by the Scarlet Empress. Near each of the poles, the land resembles the element their pole represents. Thus the lands to the south are desert, the west consists of islands, the north is icy and inhospitable, and the east is heavily wooded and devoid of large cities.

The action of *Exalted* revolves around . . . well, the Exalted. Beings with powers far beyond those of mere mortals, the Exalted fall into several categories. The power of the Dragon-Blooded Exalted is passed through the blood; they primarily belong to the eleven noble houses that strive to gain control of The Realm. Their elemental-based powers makes them generally direct but strong. The Lunar Exalted are creatures of the Wyld. Enemies of the realm, they consist of shapeshifters and animalistic hunters. The Sidereal Exalted are mysterious and inscrutable, with strange fate and probability-altering powers and an agenda all their own. Many of them personally *remember* the First Age. The Abyssal Exalted have only appeared recently, and seem to be masters of death, necromancy, and the afterlife.

And the Solar Exalted are the epitome of light and power. During the First Age they ruled with wisdom and enlightenment. But they were cursed, betrayed, and destroyed during that era, only to resurface recently. Their essences are reincarnated into people, who generally undergo a traumatic event and then "exalt" into their more powerful form.

If it seems like there's a lot to absorb here, you're right. One of *Exalted's* greatest strengths is also a weakness; the world detailed is complex, huge, and rife with potential. Practically each page of the setting chapter (the Introduction and Chapter One, consisting of the first 83 pages) provides adventure or character ideas. Unfortunately, this potential is often overwhelming; there is *so* much to keep track of. There are five lands, eleven noble houses, five castes of Solar Exalted, religions, beliefs, and hordes of enemies (sometimes literally!). It can be overwhelming.

But if it works, it can also be extremely satisfying. Unlike, say, *Star Wars*, where the factions are pretty easily discernable, the possible intrigues, adventures, and strange bedfellows of *Exalted* can make for some complex adventures.

Exalted uses the Storyteller system, mostly as presented in the *Trinity* line but with some tweaks. If you like the system in their other games, you'll probably like it in *Exalted*. If you don't like it elsewhere, you almost certainly won't like it here. Among rules changes, most affecting is the fact that *any* roll of 10 on a 10-sided die counts as two successes, instead of a possibility of rerolling. As a result, many successes are possible, as are incredibly dramatic and heroic action; it's not uncommon for six dice to roll six or more successes. Probably most interesting is the idea of Stunts, where players get additional dice for actions depending on if and how well they describe actions. (Thus if the player comes up with something that makes everyone go, "Whoa! Cool!", then they'll get three extra dice.) This encourages players to be creative and descriptive in detailing *exactly* how they're attacking the enemy, crouching in the shadows, or fast-talk an angry mob. It's an interesting idea, but one that could be abused by the wrong players.

Most of the Solar Exalted's powers derive from Charms, simple abilities that the Solar Exalted can spend some of their energies on to achieve affects. Each of these charms is based on an ability. Thus one might have an Endurance Charm of "Armored Scout's Invigoration" or "Ox-Body Technique." All of the charms are vividly named and go a long way towards suiting the genre; you're not using your Thrown Weapon Super Power, you're using the Cascade of Cutting Terror. Charms often have perquisites of other Charms, with powers increasing from those that bend reality to those that actively defy it. In all, although there are incredible combat powers available, over two-thirds of the Charms are non-combat related, encouraging diversity. (As if names and abilities like the "Letter-Within-A-Letter Technique" for a Linguistics Charm wasn't enough . . .)

In all, about 200 pages (Chapters Two through Seven) are devoted to character creation, rules, abilities, and storytelling. Although it seems excessive, it also seems *meaty*; although there will almost certainly be more and new abilities in upcoming books, there are more than enough options presented here that a character-creating player should feel he has plenty of options. (Although Storyteller fans should note that Merits and Flaws are not present.)

Chapter Eight is devoted to Antagonists, and its fifty pages present a broad though not-terribly-deep overview of the forces that will most likely oppose the heroes, complete with examples of sample antagonists. Although it should be enough to get most GMs started, this section is one of the weaker ones. This is probably mostly because of the previously mentioned large number of potential antagonists; each potential threat can only get a few pages of

background and stats. Clearly there is much room here for each antagonist to receive additional material in upcoming books.

The last chapter details gear in *Exalted*, both mundane and magical. Although the normal equipment is fairly well described, the magical equipment is sparse, and probably meant only to whet the appetite for future goodies.

Exalted is an attractive package; it's an affordable hardcover with interesting artwork and layout. The book is also *packed*, which is again good and bad. While it feels like as much information as possible was squeezed in, it also means that the small font and efficient spacing may be difficult to read. (The Introduction, in particular, is hard on the eyes.) The art is generally pleasing; almost all of it is in an anime style, and there is enough variety to keep it from getting repetitive.

Exalted is not, however, perfect. First the game is fairly complex; combat is involved, and will probably slow things down the first few times it is attempted. There are also many omissions and mistakes. Although White Wolf has released an errata file (including, for example, a scale for its map . . . one inch equals a whopping 800 miles), there are probably going to be other questions and clarifications groups will need. Also (as mentioned) there's the daunting nature of the game's scope. The world itself is large; trying to come up with a reason for characters from the North and South poles to meet -- a total of about 8,000 miles -- is *very* challenging, and it's hard to wrap the mind around the fact that characters need to sail over 2000 miles to get from the western edge of the Realm to the islands of the West. Finally, the copyediting is *very* sloppy in places, particularly the Introduction and Chapter One. Although nothing seems to directly affect gameplay, there are still enough mistakes to disrupt the flow of the reader.

Still, the game does what it sets out to do: Create a world that's both believable and rich as it is action-packed, "anime," and epic. Thus you may speak of "the mysterious warrior from the South." While in most games that would be bologna for "made up origin I didn't have time to make," in *Exalted* that means he's from the land of Elemental Fire, probably lived in or near a desert, is almost definitely superstitious, comes from a patriarchal society, and so on. It's epic, but it's *real* at the same time. And if that interests you, you will probably like the world of *Exalted*.

Because now is the time of danger. And chaos. And heroes.

--Steven Marsh

The Other Green Glass Grail

"Some traditions hold that the Grail originated as a jewel -- an emerald -- from the crown of the Light-Bringer, Lucifer, the Angel of the Morning, which fell from heaven during the war between the angels."

-- John Matthews, *At the Table of the Grail*

Believe it or not, there's a green glass Grail that isn't born in [Atlanta, Georgia](#), but in the fiery depths of outer space. It brings heresy, witchcraft, and perfection in its wake, and it's just the kind of thing you can use to give your game that certain sparkle. The sparkle and flash of green glass, spinning and whirling through outer space, on its rendezvous with a secret lineage of Templar supermen. Let's watch the impact.

*"Upon a deep green Achmardi
She bore the pride of Paradise,
Root and branch, beyond all price.
That was a thing men call the Grail,
Which makes all earthly glory pale."*

-- Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival*, Book V

Wolfram von Eschenbach would have known all about Templar secrets, because he was one. It's to his poem *Parzival* that we owe the notion of the Templars as sacred guardians of the Grail, "who give not their names" but whose "lineage is recorded on the base of the Grail." He describes the Grail, in this passage, as a luminous object with a connection to fertility ("root and branch"), gemstones ("beyond all price"), and the color green (although he's careful to identify the green thing as the silken Achamardi cloth upon which the Grail is borne). Elsewhere, he calls the Grail the *lapsit exilis*, often parsed as Wolfram-code (he loved puns and multilingual codes of all kinds) for *lapis ex caelis*, the "stone from heaven." The mysterious sorcerer Flegetanis, who put Wolfram on the Grail scent, had "read the name of the Grail in the stars" -- another connection to fallen stones from heaven. All this, however, Wolfram presents very obliquely; he may not have wanted to vanish in a mysterious fire like his contemporary, the great Grail poet Chretien de Troyes, did, in 1188.

"A damsel came in with these squires, holding between her two hands a grail. She was beautiful, gracious, splendidly garbed, and as she entered with the grail in her hands, there was such a brilliant light that the candles lost their brightness, just as the stars do when the moon or sun rises."

-- Chretien de Troyes, *Perceval*

Chretien doesn't mention the smargard nature of the Grail, but he repeatedly emphasizes the Grail's light-bringing (Luciferian?) powers, and its connections to plenty and fertility (tied up with green, growing things). He also brings in other imagery that author Dame Flavia Anderson decided, in her wonderful, sedately mad book *The Ancient Secret: Fire From the Sun* refers to the Grail as a glass sphere to focus the rays of the sun (aha!) and light the sacred fire in Druidic fanes. She makes much of the Grail's connection to Glastonbury (Get it? *Glasstonbury?*), and uncovers much exciting Celtic glass lore. The "glass tower" and other elements do indeed recur in Grail myth, and the connections she draws between magical Grail rings and the myth of Prometheus (who, apparently, invented the finger ring shortly after stealing the fire from heaven) bear further pondering, no doubt. Her big score is to point out that *exilis* means "slender", or *grele* in French. And *grele* is another French word for crystal, or hailstone (in other words, a crystal fallen from heaven)! One last green glass Grail gloss: after the sack of Caesarea in 1101, the Genoese mercenaries in the crusading army of King Baldwin of Flanders (part of the Merovingian Grail lineage, say those whose business it is to say such things) brought a hexagonal green chalice (of a glass so fine as to resemble emerald) back to Genoa, claiming that it was, in fact, the Holy Grail!

"This remarkable material, which is . . . clear and yellowish-green in colour, has the qualities of a gemstone. It was discovered by the Egyptian Survey Expedition under Mr P.A. Clayton in 1932, and was thoroughly investigated by Dr L.J. Spencer [in 1934] . . . Reporting the findings of his expedition, Dr Spencer said that he had not been able to trace the Libyan glass to any source; no fragments of meteorites or indications of meteorite craters could be found in the area of its distribution. He said: 'It seemed easier to assume that it had simply fallen from the sky.'"

-- Kenneth Oakley, "Dating the Libyan Desert Silica-Glass," *Nature*, no. 170 (1952)

So, let's dig around the Middle East for more green glass from the sky. And wouldn't you know, there it is, right in the middle of the Libyan Desert in Egypt, an enormous layer of its shards stretching across a hundred miles of landscape. Pieces of this green glass turn up in Egyptian tombs and jewelry dating back to pre-dynastic and possibly even Neolithic times. It intriguingly hints, to me, anyway, at the legendary Emerald Tablets of the Egyptian hypermagus Hermes Trismegistos, or the Emerald Throne of Solomon. (Another throne-stone, the Scottish -- Templar-Merovingian -- Stone of Scone, may also be a meteorite.) I also find intriguing parallels to the "umbilicus, made of emerald and gems cemented together" worshiped in the shrine of Ammon at the Siwa Oasis -- deep in the Libyan Desert. (An umbilicus, or navel, would be shaped like a bowl, cup -- or Grail.) It might be an extremely bizarre breed of tektite, or glass created by meteoric impact, as it has some points of similarity with tektites in Wabar in Arabia (or, as we know it, Ubar -- or [Irem](#)). It also has some similarities with trinitite, the green silica glass created by the atom bomb tests in New Mexico -- another "fire from heaven," certainly. [Ancient astronaut](#) atom bombs aside, geologists really don't know what to make of it; it doesn't resemble any known type of fulgurite (lightning-glass) and every other tektite around is either brown or black. Except, wouldn't you know it, one other type of green glass from the sky.

"One school of thought, supported by Bouska, holds that moldavites are a product of the impact of a huge meteorite or comet that hit the earth at the site of what is now called the Ries crater."

-- Robert Simmons and Kathy Warner, *Moldavite: Starborn Stone of Transformation*

That would be moldavite, named after the Moldau River valley in the Czech Republic, now known as the Vltava valley. These [beautiful green crystals](#) are most commonly considered ejecta from the Ries meteor impact, several hundred miles west in northern Bavaria. This theory rests on the commonality between moldavite's chemical composition and the soil of the Ries area, and on the fact that the Czech moldavite fields and the Ries crater are both roughly 14.6 million years old, give or take. However, not all scientists buy it; some believe that the moldavites are ejecta from Lunar volcanoes, remnants of an interplanetary asteroid collision, or even sublimed silica from a disintegrating bolide similar to the Tunguska event. The Moldau River runs through [Prague](#), that center of occult wonder and madness, and the moldavite distribution area is almost exactly the center of the Hallstatt culture -- the first Celts, which is to say, the first Grail culture.

"Both lists agree in attributing to the heretics of the Ries three groups of errors later associated with the heresy of the Free Spirit: the beliefs that they could become one with God, that they could dispense with the ministrations of the Church, and that they could violate without sin the moral law. Foremost was their claim that it is possible for man to become deified: 'man is able to become God.'"

-- Robert E. Lerner, *The Heresy of the Free Spirit in the Later Middle Ages*

Meanwhile, back in the Ries crater, the meteor left the valley so fertile that the prosperous little town of Nördlingen grew up there in the crater. Nördlingen had a church of St. George (famously green and fertility-related himself), a strong city wall, and the oldest horse races in Germany (spawned from ancient Celtic horse-worship traditions?), all of which are still around today. No longer around today are the "Heretics of the Free Spirit," or "Friends of God," a dissociated group of late 13th-century mystics. Among the Free Spirit membership were the shadowy Henry of Nördlingen, some knights of the Teutonic Order (the recipients of Templar wisdom after the persecutions), a nun named Margaret Ebner (who testified to amazing psychic powers, including telepathy and clairvoyance, and another mystic visionary named Rulman Merswin, who wrote the intriguingly-titled "Book of the Nine Rocks." Rocks? From space? Another intriguing mystic, Marguerite Porete (a Flemish nun with Free Spirit links), wrote the *Mirror of Simple Souls*, which had a huge underground readership. [Mirrors](#), glass, lenses -- it's all too wonderfully convenient. Almost as convenient as the belief in a perfect man, capable of doing anything -- healed to physical power and total youth, just like the Grail Knights -- in the fertile fields where a green stone fell from the heavens. Do the perfected men of the Free Spirit stretch back to the Celtic Daoine Sidhe -- or forward to Kal-El of Krypton?

"I will give you the richest sword that was ever forged, whereby the head of St. John was cut off.' . . . Then the King draweth it forth of the scabbard, and the sword came forth thereof all bloody, for it was the hour of noon. And he made hold it before Messire Gawain until the hour was past, and thereafter the sword becometh as clear as an emerald and as green."

-- *Perlesvaus*

Put it all together; the green stone falls from heaven. Maybe Prometheus took it from the ancient astronauts, perhaps it fell from the ["Crystal City"](#) on the Moon, or perhaps the green crystals are prismaclasts from a mighty primordial [reality quake](#). Perhaps it contains genetic engineering nanites, or a hologram-driven computer, or the [Green Ray](#) of Tibet, or the magic energies of Lucifer himself. The Egyptians and the Moldavites, each with a green energy source, each with legendary magic and fertility backing them up. The emerald umbilicus of Siwa confirms Alexander the Great's divinity, and he remains invincible in battle. The emerald sword does the same for Gawain -- and perhaps, for Arthur. The two bloodlines founded by the green glass entities sometimes conspire to rule the world, but more often they go to war -- the "Danaoi" against Ramesses, Arthur against the "Saracens," the Crusaders against the Green Glass God of Caesarea, Templars vs. Assassins, each guarding their green glass grail against all odds, waiting for the Grail Superman, the Once and Fisher King, the Green God to emerge and lead them to glory.

Frogmen of Helton

An Atomic Horror Adventure

by Jon Mollison

"Frogmen of Helton" is a short adventure written in the spirit of *GURPS Atomic Horror*. It is set in the rural bayous and swamps of southern Louisiana, but could be adapted to fit into any horror campaign by simply changing the place names and technology level. It requires a bit more work than most adventures as no statistics have been included. This is done to make it easier for GMs to tailor the challenge to their players.

Background

The mid-1950s were the last of the golden years for the good old boys club. Federal intervention in state affairs allowed the petty officials of small rural towns great latitude in law enforcement and it would be another decade before the hippies and minorities challenged societies norms. The threat of invasion from "The Commies" kept the military-industrial complex running at top speed with little environmental oversight. This lack of concern for the earth's ecosystems combined with the zest for pursuing recent discoveries in medicine would combine to form a horror unimaginable to the residents of one sleepy town far out in the swamps of southern Louisiana.

New discoveries in the functioning of the human brain had led the chemical engineers of Chemfix industries down a long blind alley before they abandoned a project aimed at curing certain types of mental retardation. In experiments on lab animals their formulas behaved in erratic and unpredictable ways, so the company decided to dump the project . . . literally. Late one spring night two men stopped an unmarked truck along a back country road deep within the swamps south of New Orleans. There they unloaded their noxious cargo -- a dozen metal drums filled with X-Gen-405. After throwing some branches and muck onto the barrels, the two men drove away, never to think of that evening again.

Over the next few weeks the barrels began to leak into the waters of the Helton swamps. Most of the creatures that came into contact with the viscous green goo became violently sick and died shortly thereafter. But one particular frog didn't die immediately. It began to grow. And grow. More frightening was the fact that as it did so it developed a crude cunning. More terrifying still was the fact that this particular frog was preparing to lay a new clutch of eggs when it began its terrible mutation.

Had anyone seen the tadpoles that hatched from these eggs a few weeks later they would not have recognized the long black eels that emerged. These tadpoles grew to adulthood in the normal time, which meant that in the space of one summer the swamps outside Helton developed a small colony of frogmen.

These frogmen and their mother kept a close watch on the humans that traveled through the swamp. Their cunning primitive minds were horrified at the treatment their underdeveloped frog cousins received at the hands of adolescent boys out shining for frogs. Like many kids with easy access to a swamp, the young boys from Helton would carry flashlights out into the swamps and use them to surprise frogs. For some reason frogs -- so difficult to grab in daylight -- freeze when a bright light is shined at them, not moving even when picked up. By then it's too late, and the young boys would do what young boys do to captured frogs. While growing, the frogmen developed a pathological hatred for all humans.

Helton

In the mid-1950s Helton was a small fishing town on one of the many bayous which led ships out to the deep, fertile waters of the Gulf of Mexico. Just about everyone in town was connected with the fishing industry in one way or another. Like most small towns, its chief entertainment were bowling, sittin' shirtless on the porch, drinking Budweiser

beer, and the high school football team. Its crime rate is low, justifying only a sheriff and two deputies. And for the last four decades it has remained relatively untouched by events in the outside world.

The Frogmen

The frogmen are vaguely humanoid. The frogmen have thick glistening skin that is mottled dark green, black, and brown -- the perfect camouflage for the swamps around Helton. They are the same height and weight as a typical man, but they stand much lower, due to their terribly stooped shoulders. Lacking a neck, their heads protrude from their upper chest, and are dominated by a large toothless mouth that splits it almost in half and two great yellow bulging eyes with thin vertical slits for pupils. Their arms are long and thin and hang down to the ground, almost ape-like, ending in four-fingered hands with long sharp fingers. A yellowish pot belly gives way to massive bent legs that shamle forward in an awkward walk until the frogman springs. These thick legs and wide, flat feet can propel frogmen forward several yards to land with a heavy thump.

Though cunning, the frogmen are still animals. They wear no clothing and use no tools, though they do have one particular island deep in the bayou that serves as lair where they drag their victims for dinner.

The frogmen attack in three different ways. Their deceptively thin arms end in sharp cutting claws. They have retained a long (6') thick tongue which packs a light slap and can grab light objects (under 5 lbs). The slap does no damage, but the slime it leaves acts on humans as a mild contact-based hallucinogen. Humans slapped by this tongue will begin to behave as though drunk, becoming woozy and disoriented.

The frogmen can be killed just like any other animal, though they rarely stray from their favored habitat; this makes it difficult to surprise them. They do have one weakness -- light. Like all frogs, a bright light shined into their face on a dark night will freeze them where they stand. The frogman will stop and drop its long arms to the ground and do nothing until it is attacked or the light is turned off.

The original frogman, frogmom, is built like her prodigy, only much larger. Even stoop shouldered, she stands half again as tall as a man. She also has a bright neon green slash of skin running down the length of her back. She can leap 10' across and 8' straight up in the air, and her tongue packs a legitimate punch, though it contains no venom. She is also the only frog in the swamp who will not freeze when shined by a bright light.

First Victims

It's late at night on a mid-August Friday. At this time of year the southern air is still hot and humid, even this late at night. Three young boys -- freckled ten-year-old Timmy Rutherford, his blonde best friend Jeremy Andrews, and his little brother Steve -- are out shining frogs when the frogs strike back. The boys are overcome by silent dark shadows, and are killed before they can even think to cry out for help. The frogmen drag the small bodies back to their island retreat. After a lifetime of surviving on tiny bugs, snakes, and the occasional alligator, the frogmen find the young boys irresistibly delicious. After the short meal the frogmen separate out to find more delicious humans.

Second Victim

Shirley Devereaux is *not* supposed to be out late walking alone with Jereboim Taylor. Though Jereboim is a bright, hard working man he made one "mistake" in his life -- he was born with black skin. Shirley's father, Duke, would skin them both alive if he ever found out, figuratively in her case and literally in Jereboim's case. But Shirley is madly in love with Jereboim's gentle nature and strong arms, and her father doesn't know, so what's to worry about on such a beautiful summer night?

The two love birds are lost deep in each other's eyes as they wander the back roads of Lafourche County, which causes them to wander right into the path of the hunting frogmen. After the initial shock of surprise, Jereboim manages to fight off the assailants, but not before he is badly cut and bruised, and Shirley is carried, screaming, off into the dark

depths of the swamp.

Introduction

The characters are enjoying a relaxing evening at Thabeaux (Tiebows), a small road side bar and restaurant. Thabeaux, a great bald black man, serves the best blackened catfish and Cajun shrimp this side of Lake Pontchartrain, and the enthusiasm of the small blues band in one corner more than makes up for their lack of talent. The overhead fans stir the thick smoke-filled air but provides no relief from the oppressive heat. It's a little after midnight and the place is packed with folks from all around Lafourche County, rocking to the high energy sounds of the band, when the screen door bangs open and somebody screams a little too loudly.

The band stops and the only sound that can be heard is the creaking of the overhead fans. Then the bloody figure standing in the door frame stumbles into the light. He is a young black man, dripping wet and bloody. He lurches forward a few steps and gasps, "Shirley . . . too many . . . please . . . I tried, but there . . . we were out walking . . ." At his point a large man wearing a shoestring tie, snakeskin boots, and sheriff's hat steps forward and demands to know, "What in the name of all things holy is a-goin' on here?" The young black man takes a deep ragged breath and spills his story.

"Shirley and I were out walking when we were attacked by . . . something. A few of 'em, actually. Suddenly they were everywhere, punchin', grabbin', and bitin'. I fought 'em as best I could, but there were too many, so I ran. I think Shirley is still alive out there. Please, we have to go out after her."

The Sheriff pauses and somebody asks, "Well, Duke?"

The Sheriff asks the young man, "Do you mean to tell me that you were out with my daughter tonight and now something bad has happened to her?" The young man nods sheepishly. So the Sheriff pries him for information. (The players, of course, can interject questions here to gain some of this, though the pace should be kept brisk and confusing.)

- *When did it happen?* "I don't . . . don't know. About 10-15 minutes ago, maybe more." (It's been 30 minutes.)
- *Where was it?* "Old Fen lane, out past the old tire piles."
- *What did they look like?* Jereboim gives a short rambling rant about tall, slimy, green skinned monkeys with googly eyes and claws.

"All right, here's what we're gonna do," growls the Sheriff. "Cooter, arrest this . . . suspect. He's obviously been smoking something a bit harsher than tobacco. Everyone who hasn't had more'n two beers follow me; we're goin' out after her. Everybody else stay here and enjoy yourselves; tomorrow is soon enough to know more."

If the investigators look closely they see that Jereboim is not soaking wet, he only has patches of wet clothing and his skin is only wet around his bruises and cuts. His cuts are long rows of three shallow scratches. Jereboim's eyes are bloodshot and his pupils dilated. He seems to be disoriented, but this could be due to shock.

Heroes who join the posse will have to hurry to get to the site of the attack before the posse obscures the tracks of Shirley, Jereboim, and . . . others. It appears as though four, maybe five, man-sized creatures with great three-toed feet jumped from the waters next to the road and disappeared where they came from. Tracking through the swamp is impossible. After an hour of stumbling around, two bloodhounds and a couple of flat bottomed rafts arrive. But even the bloodhounds can't track Shirley's scent for more than a few hundred yards. (After the swamp became chest high the frogmen found it easier to submerge and this masks any scent that would have remained.)

The Next Day

If the PCs immediately head back to town to try and protect Jereboim from the vagaries of southern small town justice, they will be stymied by a hulk of a deputy (Cooter), who knows better than to allow strangers access to a suspected

murderer. The only way to see Jereboim before his trial will be to wait for the morning. Then they must convince his lawyer, Claude LaFollete, a dapper southern gentleman in his late sixties, that they can be of some assistance. Claude LaFollette, knowing the kind of hatred directed towards his client, will be hesitant at first. Should the characters provide him with any evidence to support his case or agree to testify at Jereboim's trial, LaFollette will acquiesce.

The characters will follow LaFollette across the street to the small white jail where they must wait in the front office with the on duty deputy. The deputy, Lyle, is a fat and sweaty man with hair that is black, greasy, and combed over an obvious bald spot. When he smiles he reveals a random assortment of teeth, and breath that could choke a cow. For some reason this slug in pants fancies himself quite the ladies man and will make the wait exceedingly difficult for any female characters.

After a short private interview with his client, LaFollette calls the characters into the cell room. Jereboim is sitting on a low cot in the large cell opposite the entry door. The characters notice after Lyle locks the cell door behind them is that Jereboim looks far worse than he did the night before. They can see fresh bruises on his arms and one eye is swollen shut. LaFollette directs the characters to sit quietly out of the way and say nothing. He softly tells Jereboim to tell the characters what really happened last night. Jereboim, trusting his councilor completely, tells a much more coherent version of the attack and his getaway, though his swollen jaw makes his speech slurred and indistinct.

The characters are then free to ask Jereboim any questions they can think of, and Jereboim will answer as honestly as he can. He suspects that the frogmen are some kind of swamp spirits, but his beliefs as a Baptist compell him to think that isn't the case. If asked how he got the new bruises he looks at the questioning character as if that character was an idiot and says sarcastically, "Ah musht've fell down the shtairs."

After Lyle lets LaFollette and the characters out of the cell, the lawyer returns to his office to begin building his case. Before he leaves the characters, he looks at them appraisingly and -- if the characters were intelligent and kind during the questioning -- mentions that they might wish to speak with Doc Branson, the physician who tended to Jereboim last night.

Doc Branson, the town physician, has an office downtown next to the ice cream parlor, and the characters feel a welcome blast of cool conditioned air as they enter the waiting room. A prim redheaded receptionist eyes them warily. When they ask to see Branson she disappears for a moment. "You'll have to wait until lunch time," she informs them. The Characters may decide to talk to some townies at this point, But most people in town are suspicious of outsiders; it will take some smooth-talking on the part of the characters to get any information from them. Those locals who do talk will have nothing but spiteful things to say about Jereboim and how he shouldn'ta been messin' around with good ol' Duke's daughter and he'll get what comin' t' him . . . etc. If the characters approach any of the few African-Americans brave enough to venture into town on a day like today, then they will no information at all. They know that everyone on the street is eyeing them especially close. The one person who will offer some helpful advice is a small white boy who rides his scooter right up to the characters and says, "You should go talk to Jereboim's mama. She lives out Bayberry road and is powerful nice," before his own mother grabs his ear, scowls at the characters, and drags him off muttering about talking to strangers.

When the characters manage to track Branson down at the Easy Street cafe they find a surprisingly young man eating his black beans and rice and reading the *Saturday Evening Post*. Branson is a dyed-in-the-wool Brooklynite who escaped down here where it's always warm just last year. After introductions, he apologizes for taking so long to examine Jereboim last night, but he wasn't informed until three a.m. He then explains that he found numerous bruises and scratches on Jereboim's back, arms, legs, and chest. He remarks casually that there are actually two types of bruises, a darker and firmer set on top of a much lighter set of bruises. In an offhand voice he wonders allowed how two sets of bruises would have gotten there, while fixing a hard look at the characters. Oh, yes, he mentions that one set of bruises -- the first set -- each had a thick wet fluid around them, too thick to be water. It was almost like saliva, but there was far too much for it to be that. Also, the scratches occurred in sets of three, almost like those of a large dog. "But who would set a dog on a poor nice black boy like Jereboim?" Then, having finished his apple cobbler, he abruptly excuses himself, explaining that he has appointments to keep, leaves a nice fat tip and leaves. But not before giving the characters a long quizzical look that seems to say, "The ball's in your court now, what are you going to do?"

The characters can find Jereboim's family out at the Taylor homestead, a three-mile hike north of town. The homestead is a small run down house with an even more rundown chicken coop. The chickens and a pig scatter as the characters approach the house. Just before reaching the porch three young children bang out the front door and come to a screeching halt. "Momma! They's visitors!" they scream as they dash past the characters. Eustice Taylor is a large woman whose eyes radiate joy, even through the redness and dried tears belie her true feelings. She offers the characters dinner, although she hasn't much to share. Like everyone else, Eustice is reticent at first and must be convinced of the character's good intentions before speaking freely. She brags about what a fine, bright boy Jereboim is, and how she warned him not to have any truck with that girl, but he was always headstrong. She has nothing terribly useful to say, and frequently has to turn away to hide her tears. It is obvious that she fears for her son's life and, if the characters win her over, she begs them to do everything they can to help. She is prayin' to the Lord to deliver them all, but knows a little help from down here is needed.

On the way out they see a wizened old black man in a wrinkled black suit with a can and straw hat leaning against the front gate. He winks as they approach, and moves to the side to let them out. "I know what those things were," he states in a thick Cajun accent. "Ah've seen them a few time, out there," he nods to the swamp across the road. "They are the spirits of long dead brothers. See, Helton used to have quite the reputation among the Klansmen as being a right nice place to live. And now the Lord has sent them to us for vengeance. That's why that girl got taken and Jereboim was spared." He smiles a toothless grin and hobbles back up to the house.

Back in Town

The sun is setting as the characters return to town, and the first thing they see is a large crowd gathered outside the front steps of the jail. There must be fifty men, burly fishermen, fat businessmen, and even a few women shouting at two figures in the doorway of the jailhouse. As the characters approach, they hear the shouts for justice, protection of the women and children, and cries of "Murderer!" If they continue to approach they see that many in the crowd have bats, shovels, and the odd shotgun. They also see that the two figures are LaFollette, Jereboim's lawyer, and the slovenly deputy from early in the day, Lyle. Lyle nervously fingers a shotgun and constantly looks around for help as the gentle lawyer pleads with the crowd. It seems that the mothers of three local schoolboys haven't seen them since the day before and now the crowd wants to know what Jereboim did with those poor children. The characters can try to reason or intimidate the crowd into dispersing.

Whatever action the characters take a few moments later a bright red Ford Mustang screeches to a halt at the edge of the crowd, and a teenage boy with a flat top leans out asking if anyone has seen the Sheriff. The Sheriff had been sitting quietly in the Easy Street cafe, watching and enjoying the show outside the jailhouse; he immediately comes out. The crowd hushes and the characters hear the teen explain that he saw Jimmy Duggan's caddy parked way out on Deepwater road. This is unusual, because Jimmy would never leave his car in that condition.

At this the lynch mob erupts with hushed whispers: "Jimmy Duggan," "I knew that boy was no good," "I'll bet it was that punk," "Didn't Jimmy have a thing for Shirley?" and "Maybe that kid in jail didn't . . ." It would seem that Jimmy Dudgeon and Shirley were once an item, but that Shirley's father put a stop to it -- although everyone suspecting Shirley had been sneaking around with Jimmy, anyway. The theory erupts among the townsfolk that Jimmy attacked Jereboim and Shirley last night, and maybe Jereboim did such damage to that thug that he couldn't make it back to his car and died in the swamp.

If the characters race to the scene, they will find the story to be partially true. By now it is almost dark and the character's car lights illuminate the scene. A bright new Cadillac convertible with red racing stripes sits quietly by the side of the road, its hazards flashing away. The Cadillac sits at a skewed angle as there is a jack propping up the front passenger side fender. Two tires lay next to the car among scattered lugnuts and a still shining flashlight. The ground is covered by long wide tracks, a few of which are quite deep, but most are as thick as the prints left by some kind of boots. Careful investigation will reveal a crushed pack of cigarettes a few yards from the road and a tire iron dripping with a thick fluid that appears black in the night and green under the light of the head lamps. Obviously the car has only been here a short while (the flashlight is lit and there is a still burning cigarette in the ashtray). At this point the Sheriff screeches up in his patrol car, and he and Cooter jump out. Sheriff Duke immediately starts hollering at the

characters for interfering with an investigation, and begins to stomp towards the nearest character when a large black shape knocks him to the ground. The characters have just enough time to see a short, hunched figure with green skin, long dangling arms, and bulging yellow eyes land next to the Sheriff before the swamp around them erupts with the things.

At this point a number of frogmen attack the heroes and the deputy. Though Cooter manages to get four rounds off from his pistol, he and the Sheriff are knocked unconscious by the powerful kicks of the frogmen. The characters should manage to defeat this initial assault. The frogmen don't want a fair fight and retreat into the swamp as soon as three of their number are killed.

At this point the investigators have two basic choices: they can immediately pursue the fleeing frogmen or they can return to town to round up a posse. If they return to town then they won't be believed, and since the sheriff specifically warned the lynch mob not to go out to the abandoned car, no one will follow and the characters will have to go back and try to follow the now cold trail.

If the characters immediately pursue the frogmen, they find the going easier here than last night. They can splash through the shallow muck for a mile or so into the swamp before they lose the sound of the frogmen at a large, deep pool. If they try to go around the pool they will find it difficult, but not impossible. Their journey through the swamp will be punctuated by frogmen ambushes. The frogmen will leap out of quiet waters or drop from high in the trees. Now that they are in their element the frogmen will attempt to grapple the characters and drag them into the water to drown, if possible. The GM should make an effort to crank up the tension, describing every tiny sound and splash that might make the characters (and players) jump. Also, don't forget that smart players will at least have picked up Jimmy's flashlight to stun the frogmen as they attack. After each ambush a few more frogmen should be dispatched until only a few remain.

Suddenly, the characters spot a dim glow ahead and to the right. If they investigate they find a dozen or so 55-gallon drums half buried in the muck. The barrels are unmarked, save for one near the bottom which has the address of Chemfix attached to a label on its bottom. (No one at the plant realized this.) The glow comes from a hot green fluid that dribbles into the swamp and floats away from the barrels leaving a pale greenish trail to follow.

The trail leads to the small island that the frogmen call home. Here the frogmen make their final stand. The running fight with the frogmen turns into a stand up battle to the death.

This fight takes place on and around a small barren island that has a pile of the remains of Shirley, three young boys, a drifter, and the half-eaten corpse of a leather jacket clad youth with greased hair and a heart tattoo on his left bicep.

After the last of the frogmen are dispatched the adventure should be left to the discretion of individual GMs. If the characters have barely broken a sweat knocking off the frogmen (by clever use of the flashlights, for example), then frogmom should definitely show up to avenge the death of her clutch. Frogmom isn't just bigger than her children, she is smarter. She will engage in hand-to-hand at the closest opportunity to counteract the threat of guns, and will pick the weakest members of the group to attack first. She will repeatedly retreat into the deep waters of the swamp to prepare a new ambush. Finally, she is immune to being shined, but will freeze the first time characters try this tactic to lure them into a false sense of security.

Alternatively, frogmom could be the basis of another adventure in the swamps, especially if that nice man back at the Taylor farm learns how to control her . . .

Running Frogmen of Helton

This adventure is mostly true to the spirit of the Atomic Horror movies of the fifties -- with one major difference. It deals with the very volatile subject of race relations. Few movies at that time, of *any* genre, were willing to tackle such a touchy subject. The adventure as written does what most movies of the day would have done -- it handles the issue of race fairly delicately. GMs running this adventure should be well aware of the prejudices that players might bring to the table, and handle the politics of race accordingly. A good rule of thumb is that if you think something might be too

controversial, then it is. Err on the side of caution and everyone should have a great time.

And for crying out loud, don't let your players see the title of the adventure or you'll ruin the suspense!

Murphy's Rules



by John Kovalic

Murphy's Rules



Murphy's Rules



The Future Isn't What It Used To Be

A GM's Guide to Creating Unique Cyberpunk Worlds

by Michael McGee

Street-smart hackers with laptops, vat-grown ninjas, neon lights and big cities -- the cyberpunk genre's managed to garner a few well-worn cliches in the 20 or so years it's been around. It's almost a law that it be an urban adventure, that it involve the illegal underground and mega-corporations, and that computer hackers and chrome-plated nihilism are necessities. As a result, many GMs and players might be turned off by the setting, thinking that it's got nothing new to offer.

But just as the fantasy setting can be reinvigorated when its trappings are reexamined, so too, can cyberpunk be given new life by rethinking a few things about it.

What Is Cyberpunk?

The definition of cyberpunk varies from individual to individual, so logically a cyberpunk setting should have equally as much variance. The general uniformity among cyberpunk settings might suggest that this is not the case, or it might simply say that some writers and GMs don't stop to answer this first question.

To some, cyberpunk is about the triumph of style over substance. To others, it might mean the rise of high technology set against the decay of society. To others still, it might signify a rebelliousness against The Man, whose powers are increased exponentially by the technology of the future. Many more GMs and players will have their own definition, and defining this up front can save a lot of hassles.

A good idea is to make sure you and your players are in synch about the type of game this is going to be. If you go in expecting to play a rebellious, anti-authoritarian hacker character and your GM's geared the setting towards a bunch of corporate enforcers, there will be strains. Like any other game, communication outside the sessions helps tremendously when trying to craft a memorable experience.

The March Of Time

Most cyberpunk settings assume that it's roughly forty to fifty years in the future, and that technologies like virtual reality, neural-connected computers, cybernetics, genetics, cloning and whatnot are commonplace. While this is the "default" mode, there's nothing stopping the GM from picking a different time frame.

Ten to fifteen years in the future lets the GM have more "realistic" technologies, which are easier to plan for, while the social decay that haunts most (but not necessarily all) cyberpunk settings can be just beginning, avoiding the feeling of "the war's already been lost" that permeates so much cyberpunk fiction. Neal Stephenson's novel *Snow Crash* is a good example of a near-future cyberpunk novel, in which suburbia stands in for the corporate machine, and the best way to experience the Metaverse is through goggles and stereo headphones.

Likewise, setting it really far in the future -- 100 years or more -- lets the GM take cyberpunk into territory unknown, and surprise his or her players with things they never might expect. A good example of a far-flung future with way-out-there tech is *Transmetropolitan* by Warren Ellis & Darick Robertson, a comic with braitaped nanoclouds, biogenetic cellphones in pill form, and buy-bomb ads that play during your dreams. *Transhuman Space*, the upcoming RPG by Steve Jackson Games, also features a lot of advanced technology in a post-human era.

Choosing either direction can have its ups and downs for a gaming group. Far into the future, humanity's concepts of

morality, politics, religion, economics, and society might be incomprehensible to present-day roleplayers, so make sure you've got a thick packet of "how these people think" information for your players to digest. And closer to our own time means that it'll function rather more like a modern day campaign -- which can be tricky if you're unprepared.

Social Development

Social decay, collapse, and destruction is a staple of cyberpunk, but it doesn't necessarily have to be. People find reasons to rebel even when everything around them is going swimmingly, so a bunch of take-no-guff street punks running around in a utopic environment is possible (not to mention potentially funny -- see *Setting the Tone*, below.) Rebelliousness itself seems wedded to the genre, but rebellion takes many forms, all of which can be radically different than the standard "I have a weird haircut and a gun, so let's hack into something" motif. Ghandi was a rebel, and he didn't need an electrolaser.

Even if society has a lot of problems, they don't have to be the same ones seen before. A city in which everyone has a gauss-powered pistol could be replaced by one in which even owning a Swiss Army knife will get you thrown in jail. Ruthlessness at the workplace can take many forms -- a corporate lifer who is unable to escape his job isn't necessarily worse off than a freelancer who has to fight for whatever scraps of work the big corporations give out, or a small businessman fighting to stay afloat in a monolithic consumer culture. Corporations themselves might not even be around -- a simple stock market collapse can send most of them down for the count. And a shattered economy can kill the "universal credit" cold, forcing everyone into a barter situation.

Working these details out ahead of time will add immeasurably to your game world. There is a tendency in games to treat money as just another number on the page, instead of something tangible -- the barter scenario would force players to think more carefully about their finances, since several million dollars in gold is a real pain to lug around when you're on the run. Removing the corporations deprives PCs of a relatively guilt-free target, so having a good stable of adversaries -- or not concentrating as much on confrontation -- may be preferable. And obviously, the PCs won't be happy if they can't lug their favorite guns around . . .

Setting The Tone

Similar to Social Development, above, but not quite the same. Social Development covers the world, but the tone of the game determines how we see it.

Again, this is another area in which player input is helpful. Some players might revel in the dark, seamy grit of an urban-level campaign, where the PCs dodge the cops, the corporate enforcers, rival gangs, and the occasional Threat to Our Way of Life. Others might prefer the same setting, but a different tone -- more hopeful for example, or perhaps less lethal than the quick-kill credo of many cyberpunk games. Cyberpunk as a genre is ripe for parody, and a suitably off-kilter group of players could have a ball making fun of hacker culture, cyberpunk icons, and the fact that it never seems to stop raining in the movie *Blade Runner*. And still others might want to keep the setting but try a new genre within it -- the regimen of a military operation, for example, or the intrigue of an espionage campaign, or perhaps a group of superheroes who've gotten way in over their heads.

Enhancement Technology

It's a staple of cyberpunk that you can walk into a body enhancement clinic with a lot of money, and walk out with a motherlode of wired reflexes, dermal plating, and eyeballs that can get free HBO. It's not necessarily that simple; enhancement technology can be banned from the player's paws for any number of reasons, from supply shortages to reliability problems to ironclad and effective laws.

Even if enhancement technology is allowed, it might not necessarily be what the players want. Market forces in a cyberpunk world could dictate that the implants that get made are the ones everyone can use -- such as the Neurobauhn XB-600 Addiction Suppression Neuro-Implant, or the HaXX0rCorp Direct-to-Bloodstream Amphetamine

Delivery System (for programmers and game designers, and called ADS for more reasons than one) or even something simpler like the R&C Eyeball HUD, which displays the time, date, and today's important memos on your eyeball. Players trying to procure the Killzemall CH-500 Nipple Cannons or the LoganTech Knuckle Claws might be out of luck, unless of course they sign up for military service and get the U.S. Army Cortex Bomb as well.

Limiting easy-to-get cybernetic enhancement to stuff that doesn't grant bonuses or new abilities takes some of the violent edge off cyberpunk, and forcing players into the Army to get "the fun stuff" deprives them on the anarchistic element as well. Consequently, this is recommended for games that won't concentrate much on violence, and top-drawer roleplayers will be essential -- or alternately, the campaign could have the violence of a typical cyberpunk game without the enhancements, making skill and strategy the buzzwords of choice.

Cyberspace

One thing a programmer can tell you is that a Nintendo-64-esque environment isn't a very accurate simulation of how hacking in VR would be like. Movies haven't helped this much, since the temptation to make VR seem somewhat real - or at least understandable -- is necessary to reach audiences.

Realistically, however, a VR environment that's set up like a normal office would be the equivalent of a GUI -- something to ease computer use amongst people who aren't heavily into the guts of programming. Instead, too often, this environment is used by the advanced hacker, when really, the true VR hacker would take advantage of the fact that cyberspace doesn't have to function like normal space.

"Folded space" VR, in which everything in the environment is optimized for the task at hand, would probably be the environment of choice for the future's hackers, much like command-line setups are used by programmers and hackers of today. The command line is arcane and it isn't pretty, but it is faster than clicking on the "break into First National Bank" icon.

This would serve to separate the true hackers from the casual VR users, yet still have a vast amount of people using the system. Adapting to a virtual environment in which the laws of physics are mere suggestions would take a lot of getting used to for anyone, and it'd be unlikely that you could log in, hack, log off . . . and still have full motor control right away.

If you're using a pre-established cyberpunk game system, heavy modification of the way things work might be necessary. Players, as a rule, hate arbitrary house rules, so make sure they understand where you're coming from. And if you're building a new system from the ground up, make it relatively easy to understand in game terms -- the characters might be geniuses at sifting through arcane terms and commands, but the players might not be.

Systems that use advantages and disadvantages could give hackers certain perks, like the ability to adjust to normal space or folded VR very quickly, or an immunity to any pressures that folded VR could place on the brain. Skills will probably require a specialized version of the typical computer subset (Operation, Programming, Hacking) to differentiate it from their cousins outside the machine.

And of course, no one says that cyberspace has to be this advanced at all (see *The March of Time*, above.) The virtual universe could be limited to goggles and headphones, or worse, not be developed at all -- everyone could still have to use keyboards and monitors. Again, Neal Stephenson's *Snow Crash* gives us a good example of the low-tech virtual landscape with the Metaverse, which, even though it uses a primitive setup, still simulates the freedom of a virtual landscape well -- the climactic race between the hero and the villain is a virtual motorbike race at millions of miles per hour.

Putting It All Together

One of the most-overlooked features of a good game world is consistency; good settings have a consistent tone and feel, and not-so-good ones feel slightly hodgepodge. Above all, make sure that all the technology, social forces, major

factions at play, environments, and characters mesh together very well. If you manage this, even the most cliché-ridden environment will be engaging for your players, so imagine how involved they'll be if you mix things up a bit.

If the game only has one GM -- i.e. you -- you've got it somewhat easy, since you're defining the whole world outside of the player character's actions, and the only thing you need to worry about is making it all fit together. A "consensus world" -- with multiple GMs, perhaps -- will be obviously trickier, since you'll need to establish some ground rules on how the world works, and make them flexible enough to allow individual creativity, yet clear enough to avoid straying off the beaten path.

But above all else -- don't be afraid to change things if they don't turn out as well as you'd hoped. If innovation was a bad thing, no one would be gaming -- or cyberpunking -- in the first place.

Be Careless What You Wish For

Curses In *In Nomine*

by Jo Ramsay

"I hate you," Annette spat at the phone as she slammed the receiver down. All the thoughts in her mind were of how much she detested her step-mother, or "Bitch Queen" as Annette affectionately called her. Now she had thrown out all of Annette's old books, and still had the temerity to tell her that she would probably go to Hell for swearing and blasphemy when the girl lost her temper again over the phone.

"I hate you. I wish you were dead. And I wish you would go to Hell, where you belong!" She closed her eyes for a moment, fairly shaking with rage and impotence.

In the street outside, the traffic hummed, but the room was suddenly very, very quiet. Then someone else coughed from inside the room.

Annette's eyes blinked wide. A man was suddenly sitting in her spare armchair, with a clipboard and a sheaf of notes.

"It's Annette Cordwell, isn't it?" he asked pleasantly. "Take a seat. I'm delighted to be able to fit you in today; as you may know, we have a very busy schedule."

"What? Who? How did you . . . ?"

"Please sit down, and I'd deeply appreciate it if you could keep the questions to a minimum. You wanted someone to suffer a terrifying and inescapable doom?"

She shrugged, totally lost.

"I'll need their full name. Come on now, be a good girl and we'll get through the paperwork quickly. You wanted someone to suffer so badly that you got a line straight through to the infernal regions, and so here I am. Curses are my business, you see. So what's the name?"

She told him.

"Ah yes. You're not the first to mention her. So would you like illness? Lost pets? Cuckolding? Seduction of siblings? Parents? Children? Tooth rot? Plague of lawyers? Nightmares? . . . "

He ticked off boxes on a checklist as she either nodded or shook her head dumbly, continuing through a long list of potential evils. Finally he nodded and jumped to his feet, offering a hand to shake.

"Wait," she said nervously. "If you're a demon, aren't you going to ask me to pay for this, or sign in blood, or something?"

"My sweet," the demon grinned. "Nice little girls who are going to Heaven don't wish for their stepmothers to never have another quiet night's sleep in their life. So you could say that you paid for my services when you summoned me. I'll be along to collect in . . . hmm . . . 18 years, three months, and 2.5 hours precisely. Good day."

He tucked the little clipboard under one arm, and walked out of the front door, kicking the cat on the way out.

What is a Curse?

A curse is a purely malicious wish for evil things to happen to an enemy. In the most notorious curses of all, the malediction is passed down in the blood from generation to generation of innocents, or can drag a man's soul screaming to Hell for eternity. As a punishment, they are time-honored and effective. As such, curses have always been popular with demons and ethereals alike. Curses for their enemies, as well as love potions for their lust-objects, have also been one of the first requests that budding sorcerers have traditionally made of summoned spirits.

Curses in *In Nomine* fall into three main types. Some curses are temporary, whether they draw the attention of evil spirits, or strike the victim down with a plague of bad luck (a traditional hex). Any demon or mortal who knows the rare Songs of Malediction (see below) can issue this type of curse. There are curses that strike generations, in which a demon or ethereal personally plots revenge on generation after generation of the misbegotten mortal who offended him. And there are personal curses that are invoked by a Superior, or a powerful ethereal god, which can involve any amount of strange effects for the hapless victim.

A fourth category includes curses that aren't strictly curses at all. If clairvoyance runs in a family line, that isn't necessarily because an ancestor called down the wrath of Heaven or Hell and was specifically cursed with the Sight. Humans have shown an admirable ability to explain any number of misfortunes or strange events as "it's a curse."

Although it is possible to curse an ethereal or celestial, and most divine curses do concern rebellious angels, it is more common for malevolent curses to be enacted against humans who have offended inhuman entities or mortal sorcerers.

What Curses Can't Do

Free will is an important concept in the game. Unless your *In Nomine* game is very dark, no mortal can ever be born damned, and no man can lose his soul to Hell unless he deliberately chooses to hand it over, either through binding himself as a Soldier of Hell, or through his own actions. This doesn't mean that demons can't tell someone that he is doomed, so he might as well throw away conventional morality and live that life of debauched serial murder that he always dreamed about. It also doesn't mean that demons can't attempt to corrupt everything a hated mortal owns or loved. After all, a demon's life can be dreadfully harsh, and the poor things need all the entertainment they can get.

Demonic Curses

A demon's life is never easy. Between being bullied by Princes, threatened by angels, teased by ethereals, dragged howling to the corporeal plane by wannabe sorcerers, and rained on by the weather, the tensions of modern living can really get to an Infernal. Against many of these problems, there is no recourse except to hide or grovel. Most demons can't outgun a pack of Malakim (even if they were fool enough to want to) or take on a group of ethereals on their home turf. They learn to take out their frustration on creatures weaker than themselves and plot silently against the day when their tormentors fall into their power.

But sometimes, it happens that even such a weak and foolish creature as a mere mortal should thwart the will of one of Hell's minions. Hell may have no fury like a woman scorned, but Earth has no fury like a tricked demon, and revenge is as certain as it is cruel. It is in cases like these that demons turn to curses. Cases where the demon has come to hate a specific mortal so much that any price is worth paying, if only the treacherous gutbag can be made to suffer, and to cower before the might of the Inferno. At the reception chambers of the Prince of Fate, those who dare beg for a curse to be placed on an enemy are not turned away. Kronos is, naturally, the master of curses. He is the Prince of Fate, and that includes all manners of dooms, evil omens, and fatalistic prophecies. He and his Demon of Curses, Maraxion, maintain an open door policy, with the approval of Asmodeus. Cursing mortals is considered to be a fine and worthwhile occupation for otherwise idle demons, and keeps them into mischief.

MARAXION, DEMON OF CURSES

Djinn Baron of Fate

Corporeal Forces - 4 Strength 8 Agility 8

Ethereal Forces - 4 Intelligence 6 Precision 10

Celestial Forces - 6 Will 12 Perception 12

Suggested Word Forces: 8

Vessel: Human Male/4, Charisma +1

Skills: Dodge/3, Driving/2, Fast-Talk/5, Fighting/4, Lying/6, Seduction/3

Songs: Anathema/6, Attraction (Ethereal/3), Malediction (all/6), Numinous Corpus (Acid/4, Tongue/5), Shields (all/4)

Attunements: Djinn of Fate, Impudite of Fate, Fated Future, Inescapable Doom, Baron of the Book of Days (16th century)

Special Ability: He knows automatically when a mortal has spent all his Essence out of sheer spite in the attempt to curse a fellow, and may spend 8 Essence to appear instantly at his side.

Special Servitor Attunement: "Inescapable Doom" - The user may spend 3 Essence to curse an object (commonly a coin, or piece of paper). If the person whose name is specified in the curse accepts the object of his own free will, he becomes unable to resist any demonic powers, and the user of the attunement may locate him at any time as if he were attuned to the victim. A celestially aware creature may detect the cursed item as if it were a relic/0

Description: Maraxion is a flamboyant demon with no trace of social conscience, who delights in watching mortals drag each other into the pit. He works closely with Hatiphaz, the Demon of Sorcery (*Corporeal Player's Guide*, p. 72.), but takes a more laid back, populist approach. Cursing people is likely to incline a sorcerer's soul toward Hell, so the Djinn rarely has to waste time enticing mortals to use their powers for the dark side. He is a patron also of malice and hatred, and of gleeful condemnation of others, and uses his natural powers of persuasion to encourage these sentiments in those who he approaches.

Kronos (and many demons of Fate) find his relaxed approach to be painfully unprofessional, but no one can argue that the Demon of Curses is an effective worker. If he has a flaw, it is that he is fundamentally lazy and prefers to be reactive, waiting to be begged for curses.

As well as allowing his name and summoning rituals to be bandied freely around the corporeal plane, for use by any sorcerer who can draw a vaguely round summoning circle and has a malicious bent, Maraxion and his minions sell their services to other demons in Hell. It has been a popular service.

The Sepulchre of Inescapable Doom

The Demon of Curses' beachhead in Shal Mari is a jet black building, adorned with neon signs proclaiming that curses can be bought, sold, and traded within. Yes, it's gaudy. Yes, it's completely unnecessary, but Maraxion is a rampant self-publicist and likes the notion of himself as the Malison Supremo. The interior is dark and forbidding, forcing the image of grand and terrible dooms into a supplicant's mind through careful use of light, incense, organ music, and traditional cursing implements displayed on the walls. There is also a bar, which has proven to be a nice little earner, being popular with trend-setting demons despite the almost palpable miasma of doom, gloom, and despair.

As a curse peddler, Maraxion is in competition with any number of Lilim (who are more than willing to hire themselves out to go and torment any mortal of the client's choice, for a price) or Shedim (who don't require much encouragement). But there is a certain status in having a curse upon one's foes laid competently by a demon of Fate, and the Inescapable Doom's staff insist that satisfaction will be guaranteed.

Curses purchased here usually involve the Songs of Malediction, although more specialized dooms can be custom

designed, if the price is right. As usual, it is never possible to alter a mortal's fate or destiny simply by singing a Song, and demonic minions of Fate are often left to do the actual legwork.

New Songs

These two Songs are restricted to infernal use only.

Malediction

(Secret Song, available only to Servitors of Kronos)

This is the Song which demons of Fate use to curse those who are unfortunate enough to draw their ire. It is only taught to demons who hold the rank of Knight or above, partly to keep it rare, but also because a user can expect to be on any number of angelic hit-lists if he is careless with the power. The Corporeal Song is used to intimidate a victim with the singer's supernaturally keen power and knowledge. It is a slow and subtle curse, knowing in advance when one will die, and is favored alongside nastier measures. The Ethereal version, known also as the Song of Hexes, can be used in combat.

The Celestial Song of Malediction is particularly well-loved by demons, and when it has been used in an area, word gets around the local infernal population very quickly. Every passing demon is encouraged to try his luck on the hapless mortal, and demons often vie with each other as to who can come up with the most creative affliction for the victim. Although increased demonic activity is likely to draw angelic attention, the fact that most of the demons have no personal motive for targeting the same victim can make the root cause difficult to track down.

Corporeal -- Both singer and victim sense the precise time and date on which the victim will die, barring celestial interference.

Ethereal -- The victim of this song suffers a run of terrible bad luck for a number of days equal to the check digit (CD). Effectively, all rolls are made at a penalty of -1. If the victim spends Essence during this period to improve mundane contests, then instead of adding a bonus to his rolls, each point has the opposite effect.

Celestial -- One of the most feared weapons in Kronos' armory, this Song brands the victim with a celestial brand for CD weeks. This mark is sensed automatically by any demon within line of sight and with a successful Perception roll by anyone else. It is equivalent to having a target pinned to the victim's back saying "Kick me!" It is a point of pride for any passing demon to torment the marked man. Fate and the Game actively encourage Servitors to do so.

Essence Requirement: 5; the Corporeal version only requires 1 Essence.

Degree of Disturbance: no disturbance for the Corporeal Song, other versions have a disturbance of the check digit plus the performer's total Forces.

Song of Anathema

(Infernal Only)

This rarely used song is the infernal analogue to the Song of Witness (*Liber Canticorum*, p. 80). It is reserved for powerful, vengeful demons, who desire to devote many years of their time to inflicting retribution upon not only a hapless mortal who has thwarted them, but on his descendents as well. The singer swears a dreadful oath in which he calls out the precise punishment that will be visited on his victim. Both the demon and his victim sense the new bond between them, and appropriate effects such as discordant music, thunderclouds, sulphurous fumes, and breaking mirrors accompany a successful song. The demon himself is then responsible for acting on his oath and enforcing the curse, but he will be forever able to locate the cursed man on a successful perception roll, as if he were a Djinn. However, if any cursed person (which may include the original victim or any descendents who were included in the curse) dies and escapes Hell, the demon takes the same number of points of dissonance as he originally spent Essence for this Song.

Since fulfilling a curse can be demanding of a demon's time, servitors are supposed to ask permission from their Princes before performing a Song of Anathema. Since most demons who know it are sufficiently powerful or Distincted to be allowed to manage their own time, this is often waived in practice. What is more common, when a mortal had deeply offended a demon who knows this Song, is that he will grab a lesser demon, force it to learn the Song, and then to sing it and carry out the curse on the furious one's behalf.

This Song is treated as a Celestial Song for game purposes.

Essence Requirement: 10 Degree of Disturbance: the check digit plus the singer's total forces.

Ethereal Curses

Ethereals curse mortals out of hubris and spite, much as demons do. Even the nature of the curses is often similar. Traditionally, the victim is informed of his impending doom and then the ethereal or its lackeys set about realizing the threat. Although they do not have knowledge of the Songs of Malediction, many ethereals who are associated with malice or bad luck can simulate a hex quite effectively, or even produce more exotic effects such as turning victims into appropriate farmyard animals.

Since Uriel's Crusade, this type of curse has become more and more rare. It is almost guaranteed to draw angelic attention -- of the fiery sword variety -- and even the most malicious or vengeful ethereals are inclined to think that it isn't worth the effort.

A Sorcerer's Curse

Sorcerers in *In Nomine* work through rituals, summoning and binding both demons and ethereal spirits to their will. In practice, there are no rituals for "pure" cursing. If a sorcerer believes he is carrying out a successful hexing ritual, he will have effectively summoned some evil spirit to perform the curse. The more usual routine is for the sorcerer to summon a suitable entity and send it off to afflict the victim in its own way. It is well known that demons and demonlings are unlikely to complain about being given this duty -- or at least, not as much as they whine about almost anything else.

Angelic Curses

Although there are stories of mortals who have been cursed by God or by angels, these have always proved to be natural human paranoid attempts to explain their own bad luck. The most effective and the most common curse pronounced by Heaven happens when an angel is made Outcast, and sent to wander the Earth without rest or respite for eternity, or until he repents and seeks the light again. Many legendary cursed "mortals," such as the Flying Dutchman or the Wandering Jew, are Outcast angels or Renegade demons, in perpetual exile from their home planes.

But there are some mortals who could reasonably claim to have been cursed by Heaven. Children of the Grigori, who often have strange abilities running through their family line, are sometimes taught about their ancestors who once incurred the wrath of God.

Lifting a Curse

There are some curses that cannot be lifted by any means short of a Divine Intervention. A family with celestial or ethereal ancestors carries a spiritual taint far beyond the level at which even mortal genetic engineering could remove the bad blood.

For lesser curses, there are some standard means by which the affliction can be removed.

- A. If the curse was a one-off punishment, then the symptoms may be curable by either natural or supernatural means, and that will be an end to the matter. More often though, this isn't enough. Usual approaches would be to find and kill the person who laid the curse, or force them to retract it (if possible,) or to locate and destroy the demons or spirits who have been ordered to carry the curse out.
- B. Maraxion's "inescapable dooms" are both easier and more difficult to lift. A would-be rescuer must find the item used to lay the curse, and return it to a servant of Hell, who must take it willingly. If the item has been destroyed, then life gets more difficult; refer to plan A.
- C. If a curse was personally created by a powerful ethereal or a demon Prince, then an Archangel could lift it. This might be painful for the curse's victim, or even dangerous. More devout angels feel that months of prayer and purification certainly can't hurt a petitioner, if this is the chance they want to take.

Pyramid Review

Grave Robbers From Outer Space Card Game

Published by [Z-Man Games](#)

Written by Stephen Tassie

Illustrated by Steve Bryant and Jason Millet

120 cards; \$19.95

Everyone loves a B-movie: Alien invasions, giant ants, mad scientists, and mind-controlled zombies after your brains, let alone porcine acting and laughable special effects. Of course, not every B-movie is really bad, but for every *Them!* and *The Day The Earth Stood Still*, there has to be a *Plan 9 From Outer Space*, *Flight to Mars*, *The Giant Claw*, or *Robot Monster*. The genre is wonderfully celebrated in *GURPS Atomic Horror*, whose second edition was recently released, and in the *It Came From the Late, Late, Late Show* RPG trilogy from Stellar Games. Taking the genre out of RPGs and into a soda and popcorn game is Z-Man Games, with *Grave Robbers From Outer Space, A Sci-Fi/Horror B-Movie Card Game*.

Grave Robbers From Outer Space is designed for two to six players, who are directors attempting to shoot their low budget stinker and damn the plot! They bring out Character, Prop, and Location cards from their hand into play to create a movie, and throw Creature cards at the movies of their opponents in an attempt to destroy that movie. SFX cards can aid or hinder such attacks, as well as having plenty of other effects. At the end of the game, players tote up the value of the cards they currently have in their movie; the highest wins the game.

Grave Robbers From Outer Space is comprised of 120 color cards, wonderfully illustrated and a small rules leaflet. The cards are color-coded into five types: blue for Characters, red for Creatures, orange for Props, green for Locations, and yellow for SFX. Character cards have a Defense Score to which the Prop and Location cards each add a bonus. These three types of card form the basic movie. Creatures have an Attack Score used against the total Defense Score of a movie. Most cards also have Traits (smart, dumb, young, old, male, female, weapon, alien, supernatural, psycho killer, monster, large, zombie, vehicle, gun), instructions that directly affect play and an appropriate quote. Thus:

The Character card for Skippy The Wonder Dog has a Defense Score of 4, the Trait of Smart and the card instructions that he "May not use Props." His quote is: "What's that Skippy? Billy's torso is down the well?" The Location Card, The Basement adds +2 to a movie's Defense Score (but actually subtracts one if the movie is attacked by a Psycho Killer) and can only be added to a movie that already has a Location card in play; its quote is, "Hmm, I wonder what's down here?" The Holy Relics Prop card only adds to the Defense Score against supernatural attacks and has the quote, "Holy water, silver bullets, crucifix . . . this thing's got everything. It's like God's Swiss army knife!" Of course, the quote for the Zombies From Hell Creature card (Traits: Supernatural, Zombie) can only be, "Brains . . . Brains!" The SFX card Production Value improves the Defense Score of a female character by +2 until she dies and is explained by its quote, "It's the cleavage. Monsters are distracted by cleavage."

I could go on quoting from the cards, as they really are a highlight of the game, but I shall instead suggest that players watch out for the running gag across the cards about poor Billy and the tentacles. Z-Man Games have also posted samples of the cards on their [website](#).

At the bottom of each card is a Title placed upside down, such as "Witches," "Bloodthirsty," "Rampage," "Return," "Virgin," and "Sorority." Six cards are drawn before play begins and the Titles are used to form the title of the movie that each player is trying to film. So from the example given, the players might create the movie title, "Return



Rampage of the Bloodthirsty Virgin Sorority Witches." At the end of the game, if any of these titles cards are in a player's hand, then they score them extra points.

Actual play begins with each player receiving a hand of six cards. From these they play all of their Character cards onto the table -- this is their beginning cast for their movie. Once the players have put down all of their Character cards, proper turns begin. Turns consist of drawing from the large deck to refill the hand back up to six and then playing cards. These can be as many Character cards as the player may have, one new Prop card per character in a movie and a Location card. There can only be one Location per Movie, and a player can put down a new Location card in any Movie on the table. This can be beneficial because some Location cards have a negative Defense Score.

Attacks are made by playing Creature cards against the Movies of other players and if the Attack Score of a Creature is equal to or greater than the Movie's Defense Score (a combination of the scores on the Location, Character and Prop cards in play), then it is successful and a single character from the Movie is discarded. SFX cards can boost both Attack and Defense Scores; prevent cards from being played and even remove certain types of character from play. They can be played not just by those involved in the attack and defense, but by any player who wants to effect the outcome. In general, SFX cards can be played at any time and the design of the cards is such that they do not conflict with the basic rules. Once a Creature makes a successful attack, it too, goes into the discard pile. Actions can be repeated as often as the player wants and in any order. Likewise, attacks can be made as often as a player has Creature cards. As each card is played from the hand, it is suggested that its title be read out, adding to the atmosphere of the game.

The game ends once one of the two Roll the Credits cards have been played or the deck has been exhausted. At that point, each player totals the Defense Score of their Movie and adds any bonuses for Title cards from the Movie decided upon at the beginning of the game. The highest score wins that hand if playing multiple games, or the game if just a single session. One question about scoring that remains unanswered is if all of the Location cards played on a Movie during the game contribute to the score at the end of the game.

Each game lasts about forty minutes to hour, depending upon the number of players. It works better the more players you have, as this increases the interaction between players, but one problem is that once a player has had the cast of their movie removed from play, they are very reliant upon what they draw from the deck. This can leave them stuck, unable to build a Movie because they have drawn no Character cards; unless they have several characters to play at once, they are potentially weak until they can properly protect them from attack. Conversely in smaller games, players without characters in their Movie leaves the other players with fewer opponents to attack. Players can discard their hands and refresh them completely at the beginning of their next turn. Although this offsets these problems, there have been games where it has taken more than a turn to completely refresh the hand so that it is playable once again.

Grave Robbers From Outer Space really is a game for lovers of the B-movie genre, especially the horror kind. This game is definitely orientated slightly more to horror than it is to science fiction, but that still leaves room for the other B-movie games that Z-Man have promised us in this series. It is fun, it is cheesy and the cards are a delight -- I guarantee that they will have you laughing.

--*Matthew Pook*

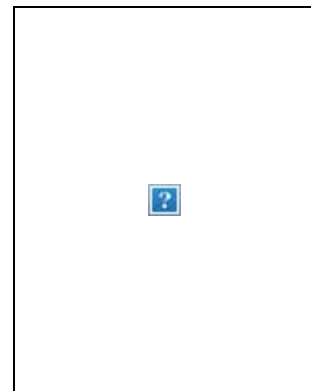
Pyramid Review

Dead Presidents (for Deadlands RPG)

Published by [Pinnacle Entertainment Group](#)

Written by Christopher McGlothlin

\$15.00



Dead Presidents is the high-powered, exciting, setting-changing conclusion to Pinnacle Entertainment Group's 2001 adventure trilogy. Following the events of *Ghost Busters* and *Rain o' Terror*, *Dead Presidents* takes the player characters on a continent-wide trek to face some of the most powerful figures in the Deadlands campaign setting. Beginning in Gomorra, the players will travel "Back East" to Richmond, stopping at several points along the way. The adventure contains all that you need to play the adventure, although Marshals with access to *Back East: The South* and a handful of other sourcebooks will find their gaming experience enhanced. *Dead Presidents* represents Pinnacle Entertainment Group's first dual-stat adventure, with gaming information for both their home system and Wizard of the Coast's *d20* open license system.

[SPOILER WARNING: The following review contains some information that may reveal more about the *Deadlands* setting than players generally know.]

The plot of *Dead Presidents* makes radical changes to the *Deadlands* setting. The player characters will be facing, directly and indirectly, the Jefferson Davis doppelganger and eventually kill him. Along the way, they will face Bayou Vermillion bokkors, witness the death of Robert E. Lee, rescue Varnia Davis from the Nightwatchers, and meet the Southern Sentinel. While facing these encounters, the players will have an unlikely ally -- Reverend Grimme, in the form of a team of Guardian Angels. While these Guardians remain in the shadows for most of the adventure, they can provide some assistance for posses who, through the accident of the dice, find themselves over their heads. In the end, however, the posse must face the considerable challenges of this adventure on their own. As such, Marshals should take the 5-Grit/8th-12th level recommendation seriously.

This being said, the adventure is exciting and well written. The investigative sections of the adventure leave Marshals a great deal of leeway, allowing them to tailor the adventure to the strengths and weaknesses of their individual posses. Because the flow of the adventure is very linear in its construction, Marshals will need to be careful to not leave players feeling like they are being railroaded. While this is a real risk, the linear structure, when played well, should leave the posse feeling hunted by forces significantly more powerful than themselves.

The game isn't all combat encounters. McGlothlin's knowledge of Civil War-era Southern culture adds a lot to the encounters with non-player characters. His knowledge of and respect for the major figures of the Confederacy adds a lot to the flavor of the adventure.

The adventure does have some minor flaws. Most noticeably, *Dead Presidents*, as the third part of a three-part adventure, flows awkwardly from *Ghost Busters* and *Rain o' Terror*. Grimme falls from the major catalyst of events to a mere opportunist. While there are interesting roleplaying opportunities made available by this change if the posse has become suspicious of Grimme's motives in these prior adventures, this shift is still jarring. In addition, there are some minor proofreading errors in the text -- most noticeably when the text indicates that there is a telegram handout for the players at the end of the book when none exists. Finally, while not a flaw, *Dead Presidents* does not significantly expand players or Marshals knowledge of any locations in the *Deadlands* setting. This is unsurprising, given that most of the events take place in locations already detailed in *Back East: The South, Doomtowntown or Bust!*, and *Bloody Old Muddy*.

[END SPOILER ALERT]

Dead Presidents does provide **d20** Marshals with three pages of new information (8 harrowed powers, the stats for clockwork torpedoes, vapor cannons, and a sample submersible). While perhaps not enough to make the adventure worth buying solely for the new information, they do provide benchmarks for converting the information in ***The Book of the Dead*** and the ***Mad Science*** sourcebooks.

Dead Presidents is an exciting adventure that is well worth the \$15 if your posse is ready. Marshals will need to do some work to tailor the events to their posses, but nothing more than is usual for a prepared adventure. Those who purchase gaming supplements for playing or reading will not be disappointed with the story.

--*Matthew M. DeForrest*

Faking It In The Real World

Back in 6th grade, my Honors Civics class had a segment in it on economics. One of the assignments we had was to pretend we were running a fast food restaurant, and try to guess what percentage of each dollar earned went to things like producing the product, paying the employees, insurance, advertising, and so on.

Since my parents were both in insurance at the time, I of course knew that insurance was the most powerful force in the universe. And so I browbeat my group into setting insurance at, like, 30% of each dollar.

In actuality, the percentage of each dollar devoted to insurance was along the lines of 3-4%. In comparison, our group devoted about 10% of each dollar towards actually making the product, when the percentage was actually around 30-40%. We theorized that the only way our restaurant continued to remain open was because our insurance was so good, we could pay off all the victims of our cost-cutting measures on our food. We also named our establishment "Roachburgers." Our motto was: "It's 100% meat . . . we just won't say what *kind* of meat."

(On the other hand, one of the other groups had a cost breakdown that totaled to 113%. So I like to believe I at least "got it" a bit more than them.)

Anyway, the point of this little anecdote is to illustrate that, as mentioned [last week](#), understanding all aspects of reality necessary for a modern campaign can be very difficult.

Fortunately, there are some avenues groups can take to help things along.

"I am like unto a deity. Roll 4d6." Over on the message boards Chad Underkoffler referred to this as "the butter knife rule." As he puts it, "If the GM says there's no such thing as a butter knife in his game world, then, by gum, there ain't any. That's said up front, and everybody agrees to it." I've always viewed it as God Mode . . . if I say something is (or isn't) impossible, then that's the way it is.

I also tend to view this as one of the least satisfying of solutions. Almost any roleplaying game is, at its core, a simulation of a reality. The more seams there are, the more unexplained oddities, the more things don't coincide with the way the other players believe they're supposed to work -- in short, the more mistakes -- the less that reality works. Soon you're in a bizarre nonsensical world that makes as much sense as many computer RPGS . . . kill the wolf, find it's carrying a longsword and a pile of gold coins. Run the wrong way down the dungeon, clip past a wall, and discover you're running *on top* of the dungeon. And so on.

God Mode is also difficult if you use more than one GM for a campaign. You may have decided that there are no butter knives in your campaign world, since you don't know Jack about butter knives, and one of your other GMs may have a Doctorate in Butterknifology. Once you hand control to him, you may discover that entire gangs, cults, and nations have arisen to further the goals of the hitherto unknown butter knife. This may be problematic.

On the other hand, there are situations where God Mode can be very useful. In fast-paced campaigns any such mistakes can be easily swept away by the breakneck pace. "Okay; the flight from New York to London takes three hours. Suddenly you realize there's a tentacled monster devouring Big Ben! You see the British police pull their guns and start shooting at it!" If everyone's having a good enough time, they may well not notice (or care) if there are mistakes.

Pool your knowledge. Don't drown in the deep end. As a GM, you almost by default can't know as much about reality as the sum total of your players' knowledge (unless, say, you're GMing for your kids exclusively . . . and even then, how many Pokémon can *you* name?). So if one of your players is a lawyer, and you're not, you may want to draw on him for legal issues that crop up in the campaign. ("Okay; the police arrive and arrest you all for breaking and entering. Um . . . Scott? Wanna fill us in here on what happens next?")

This can be great for the trivial bits that don't really matter. If an adventure is set in San Francisco, and a player has

been there (and the GM hasn't), then tapping them either before or during the adventure can help improve the game for everyone.

Unfortunately, this approach has its problems, too. The most obvious one is that GMs can't plan adventures ahead of time . . . at least, not without spoiling elements of the game. ("Hey, Scott? Hypothetically, if someone were to plant evidence in your character's house, how specific a search warrants would the police need to investigate?") Probably the best way around this is to get *lots* of options from your players, then mix and match them. If you ask your lawyer friend about ten possible bad scenarios, then make some kind of amalgam . . . an amalgam that has some basis in reality.

Make like McCartney and wing it. If none of the players have any idea about a certain location, then it's perfectly acceptable to make up something that sounds good to everyone involved. For example, if no one's ever been to an emergency room, and it's necessary for some of the action to take place there, then you can rely on episodes of *ER* as your guide.

The biggest problem with this is that any future knowledge may greatly affect past adventures, or require some hand-waving. For example, if you all (incorrectly) guess that flying from New York to London takes five hours, then if you discover the actual time later, you'll either need to retro-change everyone's memories of how long it *really* took, come up with a reason why the trip took less time, or just never mention it again. Some groups aren't bothered by letting it slide; others are. (The latter tend to be folks who try to come up with reasons why the *Enterprise* crew seemed to forget about shuttlecrafts in early episodes of *Star Trek*, when the logical answer is that Roddenberry hadn't made them up yet.)

This method also has the problem that you often can't share your idea of what sounds good ahead of time. If your plot calls for transporting \$100,000,000 in \$100 bills, and you guess it would fit in a briefcase, your players may not believe that. You may need to do a soft-shuffle quickly to come up with another explanation.

Research. (Ugh.) When all else fails, it's usually possible to research. The Internet era has made this much easier, but given the minutia that can fill an average adventure, you can get bogged down if you try to get *everything* right. And now matter how much you read about New York, you still may not be as knowledgeable as someone who has learned the information first-hand.

Research seems to work best as a complement to "Winging it." Our *Aberrant* game was based in Chicago, specifically picked because no one had ever been there, nor knew much about it. So I bought two copies of the *Frommer's Guide to Chicago* . . . one for me, and one for the players. That way we all had the same basic information. It worked surprisingly well. I also tend to accumulate a lot of "how-to" and "writer's aid" books. (For example, the [Howdunit](#) series has been especially useful for me in comprehending semi-believable criminal, police, and judicial systems.) In this way I can absorb enough trivia to make my sessions believable.

Research also works well for specific adventure elements. If you can structure your plot such that it doesn't really matter how many time zones away Sydney, Australia is from Chicago, you may want to do that. But if your plot *does* depend on that information, then definitively researching it can help.

Our world, but different. *Aberrant* also had another advantage in that it was set in the year 2008, in a slightly futuristic world. In this way we could do a *lot* more hand-waving. Did we say the judicial system took twice as long as it should? That's because the courts are more clogged in the future. Did we say it took half as long? That's because the courts are bigger and more efficient in the future. And so on.

This method is almost the best case scenario for "God Mode," but it can also feel like a cop-out. After all, what's the point of playing in a modern game if it's not *really* a modern game? But if everyone's agreeable, it can be very useful to wave your hands and say, "Yet another way this reality is different from ours . . ."

(I also have one other method, but I think I'll save that one for another column . . .)

In actual play, a combination of all of these methods is usually the best bet. You may tap your friend's knowledge of

the airline system for one part, come to a consensus about how many people it would take to flip over a car in another part, do some book research on early Catholic martyrs for another part, and respond with "because I say so" when someone asks why the police are carrying Uzis instead of standard issue police revolvers in the finale.

In all, I've found that there are many possible pitfalls and traps to planning modern games. But given how varied, interesting, and rich our world is, it's usually worth it to try to make it as real as it can be. Just so long as it's fun.

* * *

I keep seeing trailers for the upcoming movie *Thirteen Ghosts*. And I keep wanting to add ". . . of Scooby-Doo" on the end. Clearly my 80s cartoon nostalgia taints my brain, even today.

* * *

And speaking of ghosts, the evil Schedule Monsters have spirited (!) away Ken Hite again. He should be back next week; he has an escape plan that's so crazy, it just might work . . .

In the interim, we hope you'll enjoy the second week of our Halloween crossovers, as we show you how to add a bit of fear to your *In Nomine* game. Last week we had the *Atomic Horror* adventure, and we have two more weeks of goodies for you.

And hopefully we'll have something . . . *special* . . . starting next week.

See you then.

--*Steven Marsh*

* * *

*Last week's answer: **Deadwood: The Musical Expansion***

(Four stars) "Because Morgorath was testing assassins when he was finally destroyed, his death has worldwide significance. His destruction at such a moment has the side effect (not known to himself but foreseen by Istus) that all assassins begin to forget some of their primary skills."

"They Shall Not Pass!"

The Spanish Civil War For *GURPS Cliffhangers*

by Michele Armellini

Introduction

The Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) is rather obscure to many, today. Spaniards often seem to think of it as a sort of natural disaster with long-lasting consequences. Others just see it as a prologue to World War Two.

But at the time, it was considered as an epic struggle, defining the chances of democracies to fight off rampant totalitarian regimes. To Spaniards, it was their own business and, depending on the side they chose, either the last crusade against godless nihilists, or the people's fight for freedom and justice. To European nations, it was either an opportunity to expand their own political influence or a revolutionary hotbed that had to be contained. And to volunteers from all over the world, it was a chance to stand and fight for what they believed in. So passions are still running high, 65 years later.

This war is, therefore, an especially intriguing and passionate background for the kind of black-and-white heroic roleplaying that's the true mark of *GURPS Cliffhangers* adventures. The time frame is right, too.

Make no mistake: Like in any other war setting, a truly realistic treatment of playing characters as average privates would be boring: they'd live for months in muddy trenches and bug-infested shelters, worrying about the awful food, the weather, and the enemy snipers; and they'd probably die on their first action. But a *Cliffhangers* adventure by definition will portray special situations, ranging from the unusual to the cinematic.

And, anyway, the Spanish Civil War offers several unexpected, quaint, or outright spectacular elements that make it stand out from WWI-style gritty carnage and even from WWII-style standardized warfare. It had infantry assaults but also the first mass armored attacks; it had cavalry charges but these could be supported by biplane fighters on strafing missions; it had extremely colorful uniforms, armored trains, home-made armored trucks, street fighting, guerrillas, mass bombardments, and the first carpet-bombing of cities. It had half-hearted draftees and all-volunteer units; from abroad, it attracted mercenaries, spirited volunteers, and expeditionary forces; it had paramilitary bodies, citizen militias, *dinamiteros* and militiawomen. All over Europe, it spawned spies, arms dealers, envoys, refugees and assassins. At sea, it had blockades, merchant ships loaded with materiel and "unidentified" submarines trying to sink them. It provided more than a fair share of infighting, on both sides. It was probably the last war in which infantry units went to battle with their flags unfurled.

In short, it has a great roleplaying potential.

Historical Summary

This is just a cursory glance, but you can find some good primers in the bibliography, below.

In 1931 the old monarchy was replaced by a shaky republic. The electorate was unused to the ways of democracy, and extremist ideas were widespread. On the one hand, there were the rich, great landowners, which -- strongly backed by the Catholic Church -- supported the old ways, both because it was in their interest and because they sincerely believed in traditional values such as God, Family, and Country. The army was unsurprisingly conservative. On the other hand there was the mass of poor landless peasants, as well as miners and workers. Their living conditions were terrible, and they were growing estranged from their fathers' religion and increasingly attracted by new ideals of social justice. The middle ground was thin, made up by small landowners, a tiny urban middle class, and the intermediate

ranks in the army, the clergy, and the state bureaucracy. In the end, these middle classes were scared off to the right.

The last few years before 1936 saw a repressive rightist government, a military coup attempt, abortive Anarchist insurrections and popular upheavals, and general unrest. With the 1936 general elections, a center-left government came to power. Very moderate reforms were attempted, but while they were too little for the left, the right would take none of those. Timid governmental decrees simply went unheeded in the countryside where the local powers were conservative, which drove peasants to exasperation. All political parties had already begun stocking weapons and organizing militias. Political murders became commonplace. The government was accused of being unable to maintain peace and order.

When the top-ranking generals saw that not only the new government was encroaching on their privileges, but also granting great autonomy to the independentists such as the Catalans and Basques, they decided to step in. The uprising was a military coup, which was immediately successful in the colonies. On the mainland, it was successful where the conservatives had some popular support (such as in Navarre), but failed in the great industrial cities. Time was on the government's side, but Nazis and Fascists immediately helped out the rebels: the first airlift in history carried Moroccan units on the mainland.

The first stage of the war was the time of the "*¡No pasarán!*" ("They shall not pass!") war cry. The disorganized, poorly equipped, and untrained popular militias tried to stop the victorious professional army units. The Nationalists aimed for Madrid, and reached the capital's outskirts by November, 1936, somewhat running out of steam by then.

The battles for Madrid then raged until about March, 1937. They featured vicious street fighting in the suburbs, full-fledged mechanized-warfare attempts at cutting the city supply lines, and bombardments. But Madrid was never taken until the end of the war. At this time, foreign aid was flowing in: full Italian Fascist Militia divisions, German Condor Legion specialists with their 88s, PzKfw Is and Stukas, as well as Soviet T-26 and BT-5 tanks and advisers for the other side. The International Brigades saw their first engagements in the defense of the capital.

Throughout 1937 and 1938, both sides tried to gain the initiative, attacking away from Madrid. A constant of these actions was that the Nationalists, under Franco's cautious leadership, focused all their strength on the objective at hand, carrying out limited offensives; their early campaigns after Madrid were against the Basque and Asturian enclave, with their factories and mines, attacking and capturing in turn the cities of Bilbao, Santander, Gijón. On the other hand the Republican offensives (at Brunete and towards Saragossa in 1937, in a bitter winter fighting around Teruel, and in a last-ditch combat crossing of the Ebro river in the second half of 1938) were beaten back. Franco made a point of recapturing lost ground. He never was in a hurry to end the war; instead, he exploited the war's duration to carry out a radical cleansing in the areas he subsequently occupied. His policy as to the "enemy hearts" wasn't to win them over, but to rip them off. Also, as he deviously reinforced his own power base within the Nationalists, the Republic was weakened by its internal self-destructive strife, such as the fight against the POUM party in Catalonia.

By June, 1938, Catalonia had been cut off from the rest of the Republican-held territory; after the battle of the Ebro, the Nationalists launched a Christmas offensive and by January, 1939, all of Catalonia had fallen. Another internal struggle on the Republican side followed, but Franco would accept only unconditional surrender. The war ended on April 1st, 1939; a long, bloody dictatorship began.

Character Involvement

So how do Cliffhangers characters get involved in the SCW? There are several possibilities. The most appealing solution is probably "But there's a war over there!"

1. "*This land is our land.*" The characters are created on purpose for the SCW, maybe a one-shot adventure or a specific campaign; or they end up in the Peninsula and the GM has long-term plans to keep them there. This option gives the maximum freedom as to character types, and it's ideal for Spanish characters. On the other hand, existing Cliffhangers characters may be foreigners and have no reason for a long-term involvement, and players might be interested in a short war adventure, but not in a military campaign.
2. "*Your fight is our fight.*" The characters already exist and are foreigners, but they either decide they'll volunteer

for the war, or they otherwise become deeply involved. Several character types are possible. Additionally, the characters have to be seriously motivated, or under orders by their superiors in an expeditionary force.

3. *"But there's a war over there!"* This is probably the best choice for a limited but interesting SCW experience. The party has its own reasons to visit a city or region in Spain, which has nothing to do with the war . . . but they'll be involved nevertheless. The characters may be Spaniards or foreigners, and most character types are suitable for this option, barring privates and militiamen.
4. *"A guy from Spain."* You may meet agitators, spies, arms dealers in Paris, New York, or the PCs' home city. The GM may test his players' wishes. If, as their PCs hear the desperate pleas for help by the NPC propagandist, the players have nothing for their GM but blank stares, this encounter will develop just into an old-fashioned local pulp with a bit of Spanish flavor, and no trip to Spain will take place.
5. *"I was young and foolish."* If a US campaign takes place several years later, any character having a liberal leaning may have attended pro-Republican rallies, and he might have been a donor. This might have earned him an FBI file and possibly a crypto-communist label, and God help him when the witch hunts begin. American and British veterans of the International Brigades also had a bad Reputation in certain circles (or an embarrassing Secret) for some time. This might be a starting point.

Adventure Seeds And Character Types

An incredible variety of character types might get involved in the SCW. Depending on what they are and why they are there, different adventure seeds are immediately obvious.

- **Cloak and Dagger in the '30s.** At the beginning of the war, emissaries of the least equipped factions (especially the Anarchists) combed the European arms markets, desperately buying WWI junk, and were often cheated by unscrupulous middlemen. Envoys, diplomats and propagandists tried to whip up support, either on secret missions or through public (and often tumultuous) rallies. Refugees hid in France from the assassins hunting them. All promising adventure seeds!
- **Any Exotic Cliffhangers Adventure Set in Spain.** Unattached adventurers might be traveling through war-torn Spain for reasons of their own (see option 3, above). However, as civilians with no official status, they might face difficulties. They could be forced back at checkpoints, have their car requisitioned, be suspected of spying, and even be pressed into military service! If they avoid such pitfalls, they may go on with their own agenda.
- **Neutrals in the War.** The heroes may be journalists, military attachés, diplomatic personnel, Red Cross envoys, and the like. These may move through one side's occupied territories, having more or less effective safe-conducts and passes. Often, frontline areas will still be off-limits. Their task will range from reporting about the war, to gathering intelligence data, to carrying out a specific mission.
- **Persecution.** As Spain was split up between the two sides, anybody could be trapped deep within the opponents' territory. The "limpieza" (cleansing) was a bloody affair on both sides. In extreme cases, you could be put to death because you weren't wearing workman's overalls, or, conversely, because it was known you didn't go to Mass. So it would be a challenging adventure to travel through the enemy rear areas and cross the front lines.
- **War and Politics.** Both the "neutrals" and anyone in the military can get involved, willingly or not, in the internecine strife on both sides. Among the Nationalists, these were handled in a subtler way, while on the Republican side they sometimes erupted in a "civil war within the civil war." Creating the right background for such an adventure is rewarding but difficult, unless you read some of the sources, below.
- **Straight Military Adventure.** As said above, the SCW offers a wide range of possible warfare events: from WWI-style trench raiding to mechanized strikes, and anything in between. See the following section.

And Your Uniform Looks Like This: . . .

The great boon of the SCW is the incredible variety of troop types. Of course you may have your ordinary drafted peasant boy. But you can have much more intriguing characters, too, including several types of foreigners:

- **Nothing New on the Andalusian Front.** This is the "realistic treatment" described in the Introduction, above. Any beleaguered, under-equipped infantry will fit the bill. Only for those who really love realism. Note that interesting elements could be added if the unit includes royalist Carlists, fanatical Falangists, Basque nationalists,

hard-line Communists . . .

- **Columna (your name here).** The early Republican militias are always interesting. Their "columns" were haphazardly equipped, colorfully if scantily uniformed, and led with more enthusiasm than competence. Anybody having army experience was by definition liable to be secretly siding with the rebellious generals. These units will include militiawomen, fanatics of all left-leaning stripes, Anarchist columns were officers are elected and orders voted . . . They are ideally suited for really chaotic ambushes against advancing army units, and for urban guerrilla.
- **Dogs of War.** The Republicans hired foreign pilots, and some of them were just mercenaries. They also employed paid tank drivers, mechanics, etc. Their attitudes will be opportunistic, and interesting contrasts can arise with the idealists in their units. As they provided cutting-edge expertise, their adventures will involve high-tech warfare.
- **Kill the Infidels!** The Nationalists employed Moroccan units. These provided cheap but eager cannon fodder and a warrior-like attitude, as well as, probably, the best cavalry in the war. They were notorious for massacring prisoners, raping and looting, so roleplaying them wouldn't be easy; but, somewhat understandably, they saw the enemy as worthless infidels and legitimate war prey.
- **For the Ideal.** Both sides had foreign volunteers; most were for the Republic. They chose when to come, but couldn't choose when to go. The volunteers for the Nationalists went into the Spanish Foreign Legion (most noticeable was the 15th Irish Bandera); on the Republican side, they served mainly with the famous International Brigades, but also in other foreign units. These all tended to be seen as crack units, so they can be roleplayed as they fight in tough spots.
- **We're on Our Own.** Guerrillas, snipers, special-ops teams, and *dinamiteros* may have great freedom of choice as to the means for accomplishing their mission, possibly behind the lines. Special-ops are a good way of involving PCs in battle, without having them chafe under orders. The Columna de Hierro (Iron Column) had its own night-action unit called the "Hijos de la Noche" (Sons of the Night). From among the Asturian miners came another SCW specialty, the *dinamiteros*, who, armed with demolition charges, spearheaded assaults against buildings and even tanks.
- **Just a Job Abroad.** Italian, German, and Portuguese soldiers were sent in by their own nations; Russian advisers also came. They were subject to their own nation's priorities. roleplayers can try on the uniform of half-starved Italian militiamen who send the money home while cursing the day they volunteered, fanatical Nazis or Fascist officers, German professionals who're there just to field-test new aircraft and tanks, or Stalinist agents whom everybody described as champions of duplicity.

Sample Characters

Jordi Martínez, Local Anarchist Leader

ST 10 DX 11 IQ 12 HT 10

Advantages: Charisma +2, Patron (FAI, reasonably powerful organization providing equipment, on 9 or less), Reputation +2 (Fearless people's champion, Anarchists and leftists) Sensitive, Strong Will +1

Disadvantages: Enemy (Police, on 6 or less), Fanaticism (Anarchy), Impulsiveness, Intolerance (exploiters), Reputation -3 (Anarchist scum, occasionally recognized, class enemies), Struggling

Skills: Area Knowledge (Barcelona)-12, Bard-16, Brawling-12, Guns (pistol)-13, Leadership-15, Philosophy (anarchy)-13, Politics-11, Professional Skill (Printer)-14, Streetwise-12, Tactics (urban guerrilla)-11, Writing-12

Quirks: Expansive; Francophile; Prolix Speaker.

Like many Anarchist leaders, Jordi is charismatic and relies on consensus. He's also a clever propagandist and speaker. He has access to his employer's printing works, which he exploits to print Anarchist propaganda. He has taken part in past riots and upheavals, gaining experience and nurturing his fanaticism; he'll easily adapt now, since he already sees the relationships between classes as a war.

Luis Castells, Nationalist Cavalry Officer

ST 10 DX 12 IQ 10 HT 11

Advantages: Acute Vision +2, Military Rank 4, Patron (UME, small group, on 6 or less), Status 2, Wealthy

Disadvantages: Bloodlust, Edgy, Fanaticism (Patriotism), Sense of Duty (to the Army and military traditions), Stubbornness

Quirks: Staid; Often frowns.

Skills: Dancing-12, English-9, Fencing-12, Guns (pistol)-14, Guns (rifle)-13, Leadership-11, Literature (Spanish)-10, Riding-15, Savoir-Faire-11, Tactics-9

Luis is a representative of the upper officer class; from a high-status family, he's a staunch patriot but his concept of Spain is outdated. He's narrow-minded and fiercely opposes changes. He's presentable in high society and flashy on horseback, but he's a poor tactician and modern warfare will come as a surprise to him. Being a member of the Union Militar Española, i.e. the rightist organization of officers, he's in on the coup, too.

A SCW Subplot/Introductory Adventure

Take a main plot that can be summarized as "Find the Item." It is a classic theme not only for *GURPS Cliffhangers*, but also for *GURPS Cabal*, *Horror*, *Espionage* etc.; such an adventure is easily procured or written. Then set the adventure in Spain, in July, 1936, and add the following subplot. It will make for a good introductory adventure for the SCW.

The Item is small (book-sized?). Clues point out that it is kept at a Benedictine monastery on the Tibidabo hill overlooking Barcelona. As the party arrives there, they discover evidence that the Opposition (defined in your main plot) is on their heels; they are after the Item, too.

Thanks to their Contacts (or the GM) the adventurers have a local contact: Carlos Castells, a rich, old Catalan businessman. He's courteously old-fashioned as the nobleman he is not, and he insists the PCs be his guests at his downtown mansion. He arranges a meeting with the Abbot for the following morning. At dinner, a formal affair, the guests meet his son and daughter: Luis, a stiff-necked cavalry officer, and Cristina, a dark, haughty beauty (romantic distraction if needed). Over dinner, they'll talk politics; the old man is aware of the hardships of the lower classes and seems a humane employer, but he just can't stand Anarchist destructive ideas. The son is less tolerant, and says, "Traitors should be hanged!" Sensitive characters will understand the waiter dislikes Luis.

The following morning, the meeting with the Abbot is unsuccessful; no matter what wiles the PCs may employ, he's backed by other monks and won't budge. If the PCs are polite, have suitable academic credentials, and insist that they just want to examine the Item, the most they can get with a Good reaction is that the Abbot promises he'll consider their request. As they leave the monastery, the PCs will see a mob of some ten baton-wielding thugs in blue shirts knocking the daylights out of a couple of youths, while others are running away, and the bystanders have mixed (but cautious) reactions. This is a turning point. If the party slips away, they'll have a more difficult time with Anarchists later. If they try to call in the police, this will take a lot of time, and the thugs will get away leaving two badly wounded and unconscious bodies behind. If the PCs intervene, they are involved in the fight. If they use guns, one or two of the thugs also have revolvers. Unless the PCs really blow it, chances are this unexpected attack will make the muggers flee, without too much bloodshed. One of the youths carefully looks at the faces of his saviors as he thanks them and helps the other to stumble away; he'll refuse any further help by the party. Behind, they leave a few badly printed leaflets, containing Anarchist ramblings against private property and exploitation. If the players seem not to grasp the social implications, or if no character speaks Spanish, have a friendly English-speaking bystander comment upon the event.

In the afternoon, the PCs may get involved in anything having to do with the main plot (including possibly an attack or diversion sponsored by the Opposition), or in further research about the Item; but in the end they meet Guardia Civil men wearing the outdated bicorn hat who take them to their barracks "for a few questions" (make sure the players don't attempt something foolish). The PCs wait for a while in a smelly room together with a beaten man (some more background if you wish), then they are individually questioned by an officer. He says they have been identified, but doesn't seem 100% sure. He wants to know how they became involved with a "peaceful demonstration" by Falange party members and whether they know anything about the "Anarchist subversives who caused the disturbance"; however, he's clearly curious about the reasons of the party presence here. He's got Interrogation-14, and anything a PC blurts out about the Item will eventually be reported to the Opposition.

If the party did not actually fight against the Falange goons, they'll be released. If they did, but the fight did not cause severe injuries, it will take a Good reaction roll. Otherwise, they are "temporarily detained." The same will happen if they try to bribe the officer, who takes offense and throws them all in a holding cell together with several tough guys (time for a sideshow brawl). Even if the party is released, any guns are confiscated. Early in the morning the PCs are awakened by rifle and MG fire. If they slept in their beds, Don Carlos will plead for them to remain in the mansion while he sends someone to gather information; but it will turn out only the oldest servants are present, and Luis isn't there, either. If they are in the barracks, a young Cabo (corporal), together with two other Civiles, will nervously bring out a few prisoners. Shots are then heard. After a worrisome wait, the same three guards return. But the nearest prisoner goes berserk and attacks the Civiles, promptly imitated by others. The PCs should be able to take the opportunity; the guards are armed with unwieldy bolt-action rifles while the cell and corridor are cramped. The barracks is manned by about 20 men, but as the prisoners storm out, it is assaulted from the outside, too. The surviving Civiles are lined up against the courtyard wall, near the bodies of the executed prisoners, to shoot them; the PCs may get involved in this, or not. They might also retrieve guns (either their own from a storing room, or rifles).

One way or another, the party should be free to roam through a city in the throes of the attempted coup. Their intention should be to reach the monastery and try to get the Item. But this won't be so easy. The main streets are blocked by barricades, roadblocks, and on-going firefights between army units and improvised militias. If the party takes to the back alleys, make it tough for them with Orienteering rolls (failure results in a dead end) and snipers. They see a church on fire (which should encourage them to reach the monastery!). There will be chaotic urban warfare scenes, with eerily empty streets suddenly bursting with badly-aimed fire, unseen snipers taking down scurrying civilians, howitzer fire randomly falling on popular neighborhoods and platoons of soldiers running around aimlessly, while ominous explosions can be heard in the distance. Nobody the PCs question seems to know a thing, but wild rumors abound.

In the end, they stumble into an Anarchist ambush. At the last moment, the militiamen hold their fire, but they capture the party. The unit's commander is Jordi, who will thoroughly question these foreigners. If the PCs helped the young Anarchists, Jordi sends for someone, and after a while one of the two youths shows up and identifies the PCs, which thaws Jordi's attitude; if they did not help, Jordi will be suspicious.

If Jordi becomes friendly, he releases the party, but without guns; they'll be given a scribbled, generic safe-conduct that Jordi ceremoniously stamps in red ink with block letters: FAI (Federación Anarquista Iberica; he will be annoyed if the PCs laugh when they see the stamp is a carved potato, and he launches into a political harangue). If Jordi has no reason to be friendly, the PCs will be detained for a longer time, and in the end they are released without guns, safe-conducts, nor personal belongings. While they are detained, they'll see a firing squad executing two officers and a priest. Make another reaction roll; on a Poor or worse result, Jordi will have a militiawoman shadowing the party, just to keep tabs on them (Shadowing-10, Area Knowledge (Barcelona)-12).

What happened during this encounter will determine whether the PCs arrive at the monastery before it is attacked, or not. If they do, unfortunately the frightened monks won't let them in; but they will be present as an angry crowd starts gathering, and as a group of Anarchists arrives with a beam, which they use to ram down the gate. So they should have more time to devise a strategy (see below). If the PCs arrive late, the mob is already roaming through the monastery, mistreating the monks and throwing furniture and books in the cloister for a big bonfire. This should be a scene of madness and chaos, with excited vandals throwing out things that closely resemble the precious Item.

The PCs are now unarmed and have to figure out a non-combat way to save the Item. It might be already in the pile, or still where it is normally stored, or the Abbot may have had time to hide it, together with other valuables, in a secret chamber (which has to be discovered). The party might try the following methods (in parentheses, Skills and Advantages they should be using to improve their chances -- most of the options will require knowledge of Spanish too!).

- Create a distraction to scare away or attract elsewhere the crowd or at least most of it. (Tactics)
- Call in an enemy force. (Fast-Talk, Contacts)
- Plead with the leaders for this monastery to be transformed in a "people's museum." (Bard, Charisma, Voice)
- Sneak into the monastery, find the Item in its hiding place quickly, and spirit it away. (Stealth, Acting, Architecture, Holdout, Intuition)
- Show the safe-conduct and bluff their way in, saying they are on a mission on Jordi's behalf to retrieve the Item (Fast-Talk, Acting, Charisma). This is a bad idea if they have been shadowed here by Jordi's observer; see above.
- Anything else your players may dream of, possibly a combination of the above if the party is large. Try to reward roleplay and ingenious solutions.

Even if they fail, the Item can survive the bonfire if the Abbot managed to hide it. But it will be in the monastery. The problem is, the Opposition is now aware of its location, and if it isn't safely in the PCs' hands by midnight, they will send someone in to retrieve it!

At this point, you can ad-lib. Whoever has the Item now, they might want to leave Barcelona and possibly Spain, too. Or if your players are having a good time in the SCW, just go on! If an Opposition team has the Item, let the party hunt them through war-torn Spain or through boiling Barcelona. If the party has the Item, they'll be hunted in turn. Don Carlos is going to face a firing squad in a few days, while Cristina is being detained in a filthy prison; both could make use of some help. Luis has fled the city and, unbeknown to the PCs, has contacted and informed the Opposition; he might become their tool if he can reach the Nationalist forces in Saragossa. Jordi may avail himself of any military expertise the PCs might be willing to provide, but he won't like it if he discovers they have abused the safe-conduct he gave them!

Historical Sources

These are just general introductory works in English. When it comes to the SCW, there is no such thing as an "unbiased" book. Hereinafter, L stands for left-leaning, R for right-leaning.

- *The Spanish Civil War*, Gabriele Ranzato (L). A booklet containing all main facts.
- *A Concise History of the Spanish Civil War*, Paul Preston (LL), a quick read explaining the reasons of the war.
- *The Spanish Civil War*, Hugh Thomas (R). The classic (bulky) study, containing a few minor mistakes as to military history.
- *The Spanish Civil War*, Antony Beevor (RR), for another (anti-Communist) point of view.
- *Spanish Republic and the Civil War, 1931-1939*, Gabriel Jackson (L), focusing on the Republic.

Need more? Start from: <http://www.cfesc.dnd.ca/links/milhist/spciv.html>

Fictional Sources

Remember they are just that -- fiction.

- *The Fifth Column -- and Four Stories of the Spanish Civil War*, Ernest Hemingway. More useful for mind-sets than for actual facts, but invaluable as a source for besieged Madrid.
- *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, Ernest Hemingway. Needs no presentation.
- *Homage to Catalonia*, George Orwell. Very useful for the brutish trench warfare setting; also for the internecine fights within the Republican side, but don't take this part as gospel.

Inspiring Imagery

<http://burn.ucsd.edu/scw.htm>

Barcelona Map

<http://www.bcn.es/guia/welcom.htm>

Murphy's Rules



by John Kovalic

Murphy's Rules



Murphy's Rules



Doh.

The Spider's Dungeon

by Steven Marsh

The Premise

"The Spider's Dungeon" is a Fantasy/Horror crossover adventure seed for any number of adventurers (although it shouldn't be difficult to adapt the basic idea to other genres and campaigns). It is designed for any non-traditional Fantasy setting, like a political *Vampire: The Dark Ages* game, an exploratory *Mage: The Sorcerers Crusade* campaign, a world-spanning *Exalted* saga, or an atmospheric Horror-tainted *Earthdawn* game.

The heroes begin in a tavern. An old man comes up to them with a map, and an incredible tale. It is imperative that they find the Orb of Ovnok. This device, having lain dormant for ages, has been discovered by the forces of darkness in a nearby dungeon. It falls to the heroes to enter the catacombs, thwart the evil ones, and reclaim the Orb. Then it will fall to them to either protect it, or return it to the old man. Though the challenges are extensive, the heroes should be able to overcome them and emerge triumphant.

The next adventure, the King's champion meets the heroes at their tavern with an awful problem: the beautiful princess of the land has been kidnapped by the forces of darkness, and taken to a long-abandoned tower! It will fall to the heroes to rescue her from the evil wizard who has spirited her away, intent on using her for his dark rituals.

And so on. Each adventure, the tavern will be awash with petitioners -- one at a time -- with a problem that threatens the entire land. And it will fall to the heroes to explore the dungeon, tower, catacomb, or castle the problem directs them to.

And all will be right with the world, until the heroes notice something.

The weather hasn't changed.

It's always a beautiful temperate day, with a shining sun and a cloudless sky. In short, the weather is perfect for adventuring, and has been for as long as they can remember.

At this point (or before!) the heroes might start to get suspicious. The world doesn't seem to present the same challenges it did previously. Political rivals aren't plotting against them. The call of far-off lands no longer beacons. The previous omnipresent threat of Horror-taint doesn't seem as prevalent (except, of course, in the dungeons they explore). It seems a perfect world for the would-be adventurer.

In fact, if the heroes try to leave, the world will seem to discourage it. Or, at least, it won't seem to make a difference. Throughout the land, the forces of good in need of champions will know which tavern to stop at, seeking the help of heroes. For that matter, there will be no shortage of taverns . . . all of them similar enough to be comforting.

Eventually the heroes will escape (see below) . . . and wake up.

There, in the maw of a Trap, they will discover that their entire collective experiences -- from when the old man first came to them regarding the Orb -- have been a figment. Instead, they have been motionless, sharing a figment world of mundane challenges, designed specifically to keep them docile and unquestioning. Starving, surrounded with their own filth, and gnawed by vermin (or the trap itself), it will fall to the heroes to escape, and fight their way out.

What Really Happened

The true story depends on what kind of campaign the heroes are normally a part of. In a political campaign they may

have been lured into the dungeon of a rival, who sprang the Trap on them. In an exploratory game they may have stumbled across the Trap in any environment they might normally have been exploring (far-off lands, hidden caerns, mystic realms, or the like). In a campaign with horrific elements, they might have attracted the attention of Something Man Was Not Meant To Know That Likes To Play With Its Food.

Regardless, the adventure begins *En Medias Res* (although the heroes don't know it); they have already sprung the Trap, and are dealing with the consequences.

The Trap

The Trap is designed to make those in it as docile and unquestioning as possible. To that end it creates a figment world, based off the experiences, thoughts, and memories of those in the trap. It is, however, not very creative, relying on permutations of standard ideas and stories to keep those within "entertained." Thus it can only create what would be described as "dungeon crawls," with simple goals and little interaction. (In actuality it probably doesn't even need to create *that* . . . standard dreams of sex and money would be enough to keep most of the Trap's victims occupied. But the heroes are made of sterner stuff than that.)

The exact nature of the Trap is left up to the GM, and should be consistent with the existing campaign world. Some possibilities include:

- **Magical.** The Trap is a spell or device that links the minds of those within. It cannot kill the party by itself, but it can slowly starve them and leave them exposed to their enemies and the elements. Once the party escapes, they will not need to worry about the Trap anymore, but whatever set it is likely to be waiting in the wings.
- **Organic.** The Trap is actually a creature that has attached itself to the party. It may either be devouring them physically (perhaps by slowly digesting their bodies), or mentally, maybe by feeding off their thoughts or savoring the anguish of their attempts to escape. Regardless, once they break free of the figment world they will need to fight or escape the entity.
- **Spiritual.** The Trap is a side effect of having traveled to (or been trapped in) some other plane, extradimensional space, or dream realm. Once they escape the figment world they may not be in any other immediate danger, but they may need to find their way home.

Both in and out of game, the Trap is willing and able to do whatever is necessary to "hook" the PCs. If the adventurers are only interested in tracking down tomes of arcane lore, then there will be rumors of ones with the Orb/Princess/whatever . . . rumors which will prove true, even though the tomes will be meaningless. If one of the heroes isn't interested unless he discovers more facts regarding his long-lost father, then it will hint that he might find that information in the dungeon . . . and generate those "facts" again as a reward. (Of course, these facts will probably be based on the heroes' own beliefs or suspicions; the Trap is unable to fabricate truly interesting resolutions.)

The Figment World

Out of game, "The Spider's Dungeon" is a wonderful chance to introduce more traditional "dungeon crawls" to fantasy games that otherwise wouldn't be able to support them. Although this adventure will eventually turn very ugly, before then it can be a nice change of pace for all involved. It will fall to the GM to determine how much fun everyone is (or isn't) having, so he can pace the adventure's revelation. Some groups might like several figment world adventures (the idea of sending Vlad the Eighth Generation Angry One through more "traditional" hack 'n' slash fantasy challenges can be appealing), while other groups may grow bored quickly. The GM will need to be careful; the goal is *not* to present a series of boring scenarios to the players, but to offer straightforward challenges to them when they are normally expecting something else.

Regardless of how much fun everyone is having, the GM will need to eventually pull the rug out from under the players. This, too, will require finesse and empathy on the part of the GM. Players may react poorly to learn that the last month's worth of adventures haven't "counted." The GM would do well to try to make sure other opportunities for lasting effects present themselves. For example, any PC interactions with each other will "matter," and be real, even if

their environments weren't. Likewise they may be able to glean insight into themselves, their own thoughts and desires, and each other, drawing satisfaction from that. (If nothing else, any experience points received in the figment world are retained.)

In game, the figment world should be "fun" (more actually, "challenging" . . . although the distinction for many heroes is elusive) while being consistent with the campaign, albeit in an uncreative way. Thus whatever monsters or adversaries are prevalent will remain such in the figment world. The figment world won't create goblins, demons, or zombies where none exist, but if they *do* exist, it won't be afraid to use them, even if logically it wouldn't make sense. For example, you can have your 10' x 10' room with 27 orcs standing around (waiting to be attacked) or a dragon in the middle of a dungeon with passageways too narrow for it to ever have gotten in there. Attempts to discern history of items, locations, or people will be overly broad and somewhat boring: "Long ago, the Temple of Parool was devoted to goodness and light. But then it came under attack from the forces of darkness, led by the dreaded Zalrakark . . ." Earth-shattering quests and adventures will fail to have any repercussions once completed. This is the time to dig up and modify those decades-old adventures you have sitting around.

Discovering The Trap

How the party discovers the Trap will, again, vary from group to group, and should be adjusted accordingly. The fact that the universe seems to be handing them challenges completely unlike what they are used to should be a clue. So should their inability to meaningfully advance their own subplots, researches, and intrigues; any attempts will be unsatisfied and boring, and ultimately lead to the "dungeon crawl." ("After a week of research, you are unable to discover any illicit deeds by Viceroy Fang. In frustration you return to your favorite tavern, where you catch the eye of an old man who seems to be waiting for you . . .")

Attempts to flee the figment world's attempts at keeping the heroes occupied will be met with passive resistance. Journeying to other lands merely transports the dungeons/towers/caves to those new lands. Refusing to go on a quest simply means the figment world creates another one, hoping that one will spark the victims' interest more.

The Trap will be most easily discovered if the hero does something uncategorically out of character or illogical (like slapping a respected authority figure, going to sleep in front of a raging dragon, or drinking lava). The figment world can only respond to things the way the hero might expect them to; without any solid basis in reality, those actions cannot have responses. Thus the authority figure wouldn't notice being slapped, the dragon waits for the hero to wake up, and the lava is warm and soothing.

Escaping The Trap

Once they are aware of it, the heroes will probably try to escape the Trap. (Of course, good roleplayers might have fun with the idea that they don't *want* to leave the Trap . . . especially if the "real" world is particularly difficult, painful, or miserable for the victim.)

How, exactly, the heroes escape is again up to the GM; here are some possibilities.

- **Discovery:** The simple act of discovering that reality is not what it seems may be enough to shock them out of it. Although not terribly satisfying, this method can be useful if the players have had a difficult time seeing through the ruse.
- **Completion:** It's also possible that finishing a certain number of quests or adventures will tear the Trap; it may simply have run out of ideas. Again, this solution is less than satisfying, but it's also good if the players haven't figured out what's going on.
- **Investigation:** William Poundstone's advice for making sure you were in the real world -- as opposed to a dream -- was to keep a book of limericks. If you were ever unsure of your state, turn to a random unread limerick; if it made sense, you were in the real world (since it's difficult to make up a good limerick on the spot, let alone in a dream). Although it seems ludicrous, something like this might work. The heroes might simply seek a situation or object where they couldn't possibly know ahead of time what was going to happen, and do it. Of course, it

falls to the heroes to figure something out (though a sadistic GM might send the heroes on a quest for the Tome of Enlightenment . . . only to discover it's a book of nonsensical limericks!).

- **Willpower:** If a hero is sufficiently strong-minded, he might be able to simply exit the faux reality through sheer force of will. (He may even be able to force himself *back* into it!) At most only one hero should be able to do this . . . it will fall to him, then, to try to save his compatriots.
- **Pain:** The Trap will go out of its way to keep from seriously harming or killing anyone in the figment world; otherwise it would need to fabricate another world for that dead person, which would tax its resources. The heroes may notice this, and discover that sufficient pain in the figment world can snap them out of it.
- **Death in the Waking World:** The heroes *are* trapped in the real world, and what happens there will have an effect on the figment world. If they can't work a way out themselves, then, they may be stuck until one of the party is digested, devoured by rats, or slain by their trapper. (Ideally this would be an NPC, since having a hero die off-camera this way is seldom satisfying.) The effect in the faux world would be immediate as that person died, quite possibly without a seeming reason.
- **Suicide:** Possibly the epitome of the Pain option, attempting to kill oneself in the figment world may well "pop" a hero out of it and into the real world. Of course that would require some cautionary prompting by the GM ("Are you *sure* you want to do that?"), possibly creating a good roleplaying scene. And it's up to the GM to see what effect that would have . . .

Back in the Real World

The "climax" of the adventure should, ideally, be the beginning of the horrific part. The heroes will emerge again in the real world. A dramatically appropriate amount of time will have passed (enough to make life *very* difficult). Disoriented, starving, and digested/gnawed/wounded, they need to defeat either the Trap (if it is alive) or whoever placed the Trap.

And things might be worse . . . they may need to escape wherever the trap *was*. (Particularly sadistic GMs may want to put it in the climactic room of the first "Orb of Ovnok" adventure, making that the only "real" dungeon, and meaning they would need to fight their way out in such a weakened condition.)

Running "The Spider's Dungeon," and Variations

This adventure should only be attempted if the GM is feeling particularly brave, and he believes the players will have fun. Although it plays with one of the major presumptions of players (that the world the GM presents is "real"), it can also feel like wasted time. *Know your players*, and don't make them feel you've violated the GM trust. It's a *very* fine line between interest and frustrated boredom. It is much better to play it safe than to risk boring your friends.

The theme of this game ranges from optimism in the beginning, to confusion as the nature of the world unfolds, to panic and helplessness as the trap is sprung. The heroes will be in a situation they may not feel comfortable in at peak performance, let alone having been through hell (or at least a dungeon crawl). Ideally the players will emerge from this feeling like they have taken on the worst that *two* worlds can offer, and escaped it.

Of course, evil GMs might make the heroes wonder if their victory wasn't *too* easy . . . once you know you've left reality, you can never be sure you've returned.

As a variation, perhaps time in the figment world *is* a paradise (of sorts) to the right characters. (This is especially true if the Trap doesn't directly harm those within it.) If the Trap could be controlled, it might be a tempting place to visit . . . or place others (voluntarily or otherwise).

Demystifying The Computer

Optional Rules for *GURPS* Computers

by Michael J. Daumen

Though *GURPS* campaigns can range far into the future, in game terms they have progressed little since the advent of the personal computers of the late 1900s. Existing rules simulate a wide variety of computing devices with only a few variables: weight, volume, power, cost, and Complexity. All *GURPS* computers use today's technology; however, computers didn't work that way in the past, and they won't always do so in the future. *GURPS Steampunk* addresses machines that might have existed a century ago, offering some variations to traditional models. But the computers of tomorrow have been given little attention.

Alternate technologies for computers have many applications in modern-day and futuristic *GURPS* settings. Cutting-edge processors may power the advanced labs of a supers campaign, or be the target of corporate or government espionage. They may be the prerequisite for the self-aware AIs of the cyberpunk genre. A starfaring civilization relies on computers for astrogation and the storage of a galaxy of scientific knowledge. The future even holds a place for the analytical engines of *GURPS Steampunk* on planets that have regressed from galactic technology (as in *Traveller's* Long Night), or have developed along alternate scientific paths.

GURPS rules assume that a computer is electronic -- data is stored and manipulated through electrical control of binary switches and gates. In the last fifty years, successive generations of computers have become smaller, faster, and cheaper. But there are physical and chemical limits to the size and speed of microchips; as the twenty-first century begins these barriers are in sight. Advanced technology books in the *GURPS* system do not address the fundamental limits of current machines or the options available tomorrow.

The other major disadvantage of electronic computers is their vulnerability to electromagnetic interference, whether from a nuclear explosion or eavesdropping. In our world, most people use computers without this concern, but in some *GURPS* futures (especially those involving space combat and post-apocalyptic radiation) it is an important consideration. Current rules allow computers to be hardened against pulse damage at an increase in weight and cost. Machines from both the past and the future have varying degrees of protection from this problem.

GMs who want personal or vehicular computers with more detail can follow the design process outlined below. There are no new variables to add, just a description of the technology used to make computations.

1. **Select designing TL.** Computers as most readers know them were envisioned in the mid-19th Century and attained familiar forms in the late 20th Century. However, mechanical calculators have existed for centuries. TL determines which technologies are available, and affects the Complexity of the computers that use them. Mechanical Computers can be built in any period, but reach their peak at TL5 and are outperformed by later technology. Vacuum tubes appear in TL6 and obsolete by TL7. Optical computers are perfected in TL8 and quantum devices in TL10. Neither advanced technology becomes obsolete at higher TLs.
2. **Select computer size.** The weight, cost, volume, and power requirements of computers restrict their uses in vehicles and campaigns. Most of the sizes and specifications in Table 1 are "standard" sizes from G:VE61. The Tiny and Megaframe sizes appear in G:STM85; the latter is too unwieldy at high TLs! Many *GURPS* rulebooks have figures which differ slightly; consider this table as a guideline when confronted with inconsistencies. Once a GM knows a computer's size and TL, its Complexity is easily calculated.

Table 1: Computer Parameters

Size	Weight (lbs.)	Volume (cf)	Cost (\$)	Power (kW)	Complexity
<i>Tiny / Tablet</i>	2	0.04	\$500	neg.*	TL-7

<i>Personal / Briefcase</i>	10	0.1	\$1,000	neg.*	TL-6
<i>Miniframe</i>	50	0.8	\$15,000	neg.*	TL-5
<i>Microframe</i>	400	4	\$40,000	0.1	TL-4
<i>Mainframe</i>	500	10	\$200,000	1	TL-3
<i>Macroframe</i>	2,000	80	\$2,000,000	10	TL-2
<i>Megaframe**</i>	25,000	500	\$12,500,000	100	TL-1

* Can runs independently on power cells (see p. S65)

** Unavailable after (early) TL7. Cannot be built with optical or quantum technology.

3. **Select computing technology.** The specifications in Table 1 are based on electronic computers used in the present day. Table 2 shows how other technologies will affect the specifications of the computer. Alternate technologies have certain features built in to their computers.

By TL7, the two primitive technologies are totally supplanted by electronic machines. This "early" obsolescence cuts off the cost and size benefits of designing machines at higher-than-minimum TLs. Mechanical computers built after TL6 and vacuum tube computers built after early TL7 are no better than their ancestors -- they are merely historical curiosities. In other circumstances, halve (or quarter) the cost, volume and weight of computers built at one (or two) TLs higher than a technology's minimum TL.

GMs who desire even more detail can represent the wide variety of electronic computers by splitting TL7 into "early" (transistors), "middle" (integrated circuitry), and "late" (microchips) TL7. Multiply the parameters of early TL7 devices by 1.25 and late TL7 devices by 0.75 to reflect these developments.

Table 2: Computing Method

	Mechanical	Vacuum Tube	Optical	Quantum
Weight Multiplier	x5	x2	x2	x0.5
Volume Multiplier	x5	x5	x1.5	x0.5
Power Multiplier	x10	x4	x1	x7.5
Cost Multiplier	x0.1	x0.75	x7.5	x12
Features	Dedicated**; Hardened	Dedicated; Hardened	EMP Resistant***	EMP Resistant***
Minimum TL	5*	6	8	10
Maximum TL	6	early 7	none	none

* TL5 is optimum technology; see GURPS: Steampunk for mechanical devices at lower TLs.

** If not dedicated, reduce Complexity by 2.

*** Resistant to pulse damage but not TEMPEST interception (but can be for double weight, volume & cost)

4. **Select terminals and special features.** Computers be additionally made Compact, Dumb or Genius, Dedicated, or High Capacity (as outlined on p. VE61). Any computer made at TL6- is Dedicated at no change in stats; otherwise reduce Complexity by 2. Electronic computers can be hardened per the normal rules.

The addition and use of terminals is unchanged -- see p. VE62.

5. **Complete description.** The only additional piece of information necessary to record is the designing technology. A useful format is:

[TL] Name: [features] [technology] [size], weight, volume, power, cost, Complexity.

It is not necessary to record negligible power requirements. If a TL6- machine is not dedicated, note this in parenthesis after the Complexity.

Example: A GM wants to create wrist-mounted computers for scientific use. The base size is Tiny/Tablet and the designing TL is 10. A design using optical technology would cost \$500 times cost multiplier (7.5) and divided by 1/4

for two increases in TL (\$937.50), weigh 1 lb., and have a complexity of (10-7=) 3. While its components will withstand the radiation from a nuclear blast, the handcomputers will still be subject to remote surveillance.

TL10 Wristcomp: Optical Tiny/Tablet, 1lb., 0.02cf, \$937.50, Complexity 3.

It's a bit more work to convert *GURPS Space* or *GURPS Traveller* ship modules. Replace the given computer system with its counterpart, then recompute cost, weight, and volume. Ignore hull space changes of less than 0.25 -- round up or down to the nearest half-space.

Example: The captain of the *Melisande* needs to replace his ship's combat-damaged TL8 mainframe. Unfortunately, his hasty retreat has brought him to a TL6 planet. Rather than staying stranded, he decides to replace the old electronic system with a vacuum tube clunker. To run his astrogation program of Complexity 3 he opts for a vacuum tube macroframe computer with genius capability. It will weigh 4,000 lbs., take up 400 cf of space, and cost \$10.5 million of his high-tech cargo. The modification increases the weight of the small bridge from 2.9 to 4.5 tons and the hull spaces to 1.5. He can take some consolation that his system is still hardened with no extra cost. Complexity will be TL6 - 2 (for macroframe size) - 2 (he wants to run multiple programs, so takes the penalty for an undedicated system) + 1 (for the genius option) = 3, enough to run his hyperspace calculations and one other program. While the repairs are proceeding he'll have to hire native programmers for new software, and add tubewatching duties to the crew schedule!

TL6 Astro-calculator: Genius vacuum tube mainframe, 2Tns, 400cf, \$10,500,000, 40kW, Complexity 3 (not dedicated).

The computer technologies envisioned by this article are explained below:

- *Mechanical computers* have existed since the abacus. The mathematicians Pascal and Leibnitz built complex four-function calculators modern humans could appreciate in the 1700's, but the technology did not progress further until the mid 1800's. Charles Babbage's ideas linked these early models with a unique feature of the Jacquard loom, which could read and duplicate patterns punched into a card. His engines could follow a user's specific instructions for a variety of needs. Babbage envisioned other modern features, including memory storage and printers, but his designs were beyond the manufacturing capacity of his day. Mechanical computers are by nature immune to EMP damage, so a mechanical computer will automatically resist EMP and TEMPEST effects (p. UTT84) without any increase in cost or weight. Mechanical computers for alternate earths and pre-TL5 societies are extensively detailed in *GURPS Steampunk*.
- *Vacuum Tube computers* use the technology that spawned radio and television to make calculations. Electrons jumping through charged chambers take the place of the gears and switches in a mechanical calculator. By World War II scientists in Britain and the United States were operating sophisticated vacuum tube machines for codebreaking, ballistics, and fission reaction modeling. Yet the tubes themselves were bulky, wore out quickly, and required significant time to cool down between uses. Within a decade, transistors were replacing them at great cost and space savings. Still, vacuum tubes are immune to radiation damage and surveillance without any hardening modifiers.
- *Electronic computers* are today's (and *GURPS'*) standard. Wires carrying increasingly available electrical current were less bulky and more resistant to vibration than vacuum tubes. During TL7 transistors, integrated circuits, and microchips each supplanted their predecessors, providing more speed and power at a fraction of the space and cost of earlier systems. But the properties of microchip materials establish downward limits on how small electronics can be. And the heat so many circuits generate causes greater harm to components and performance as size shrinks.
- *Optical computers* use photons in place of electrons, which reduces the size constraints of today's machines. Instead of wires and circuitry, their pathways use lasers and fiber-optic lines. Later refinements allow for two-dimensional films and three-dimensional blocks of optical material, manufactured in microgravity. Fiber optics appear in late TL7, and are used in some TL7 computer designs, but only orbital or contra-grav industries of TL8+ can construct completely optical systems. Optical computers are immune to EMP damage, but not remote surveillance from TEMPEST. Hardening to prevent such surveillance doubles cost and weight.
- *Quantum computers* operate at speeds beyond current computers by increasing the number of states each bit can use. A classical bit, one used in today's equipment, can be either 1 or 0, on or off -- but a quantum bit can be in

both or more states at the same time. Thus, a quantum device can perform many more calculations than a traditional computer of the same size. Current proposals for creating quantum bits use ions trapped in magnetic fields and polarized photons interacting in an optical cavity. Any method adopted will demand far more power than previous technologies. Like optical computers, quantum computers resist radiation damage but must need additional safeguards against TEMPEST interception.

Introduction

by Chad Underkoffler

Hi. My name is Chad Underkoffler, and I get ideas. A lot of ideas. A whole heaping helping of ideas, especially for RPG settings. Now, my gaming groups over the years -- a great bunch of guys and gals, mind you -- has been great about indulging me by running in a number of them, but I get so many that there's just not enough time to play in them all. That's where the idea for this column sprang from, and Steven has been kind enough to give me an opportunity to share them with all of you in "Campaign in a Box."

"Campaign in a Box" (CiaB) is intended to be a handy resource for Game Masters. Every other month, I will give you the core elements of an RPG campaign, ready and waiting for adaptation to your favored game system. I'll offer advice and comments on how to run it, twist it, spank it, and make it your own.

A typical CiaB will usually include:

- Campaign Setting and Background Information
- What Everybody Knows
- What Everybody Doesn't Know
- NPC Backgrounds
- NPC Interaction Matrix
- Items & Locales
- Events and Possible Story Arcs
- Opportunities & Pitfalls
- Other Resources

I hope to try something new -- be it a new perspective, tool, or concept -- every month, subject only to word count and the Editorial Pen. Many CiaBs will contain:

- Genre Advice
- Style Advice
- Theme Advice
- Other Tips, Tricks, & Tools for GMs

Some assembly required; players not included.

I'm interested in hearing feedback on these columns -- feel free to email me at chadu@yahoo.com or leave a message on the *Pyramid* [discussion group](#) (tag it with [CiaB] in the subject line, please); I'm especially interested in hearing if anyone runs in one of these campaigns! I have plenty of ideas for the foreseeable future (I'm researching my December column right now), but I am interested in any specific genres or crossovers that people may be interested in seeing next year; this input will help me organize which column I work on and send off to Steven next.

Thank you, and enjoy.

Planet Ugarte, Backwater of the Terran Hegemony

by Chad Underkoffler

Genre: Space Opera with a dose of Noir

Style: Adventure, Intrigue, and Drama

Themes: Hard Choices, Self-Discovery, Plots Within Plots

Campaign Setting & Background Information

-- Start Transmission --

Galactic Archive Datafile

Sector: 2112

System: Esskay

Star: Crabbe, K-Ib Type (orange)

Planet Name: Ugarte (Crabbe II, 50 AU)

Planet Type: Earthlike, Low-Iron

Density: 4.5

Diameter: 10,641 miles

Gravity: 1.1 G

Moons: None

Year: 102 Terran Days

Local Day: 35 standard hours

Axial Tilt: 23 degrees

Atmosphere: Oxygen-Nitrogen (0.96 standard pressures)

Climate: Arid; Two seasons -- Dry and Wet

Hydrographic Percentage: 40% surface water; largely tied up in polar caps, 2 small oceans, 1 major river system, numerous oases, and seasonal wadis

Terrain: Ranges from Desert/Barren to Plains/Steppe to Hilly/Rough

Mineral resources: Scarce

Native Flora: Xenobacteria 45A67Q and its descendant strains

Native Fauna: None

Transplanted Terran Flora:

[Engineered] Paragon Poverty Grasses, Gimel series; Hydrobarley; Quanta-7 Millet; Quadrotricale Wheat; ChicagoCorp Desert Citrus species (orange, lemon, bergamot).

[Natural] Wild Olive; Cork Oak; Desert Willow; Smoke Thorn; Pinon Pine; Cliff Rose; Utah Penstemon; Thyme.

Transplanted Terran Fauna:

[Engineered] Beefsnake; Dairysnake; Genetech Bighorn Survival Sheep; McDougal Scorpion; Como Lotaldo Ostrich.

[Natural] Dromedary Camel; Fennec; Egyptian Mongoose; Berber Skink; Kangaroo Rat; Canyon Wren; Roadrunners; Honeybees; Scorpions.

Population: 2 million

Government: Autonomous City-States, Military Meritocracy

Import Restrictions: See Hegemony Importation, Schedule A7

Export Restrictions: See Hegemony Exportation, Schedule Z13

NOTE: Ugarte is under Class VII Egress Restrictions; Authorization Codes from Planetary Governor or Hegemony required

Starport: Port Renault

-- End Transmission --

What Everybody Knows

Arms & Armor: We're talking rayguns and swords. Armor is limited to sturdy leather or leather equivalents. The Star Guard and the Ugarte Planetary Forces tend to pack raygun carbines and cutlasses, and wear ceremonial

breastplates and small pot helms.

Hyperspace, Hypergates and Hyperdrives: Four hundred years ago, the discovery of hyperspace greatly enhanced the speed of interstellar travel. While a few hyperdrive-equipped ships can leap to hyperspace on their own, most ships must enter this dimension through the ring of a hypergate. The hypergate generates a hyperfield, much like the film of soap over a bubble-blowing ring. As the ship passes through the ring, hyperfield receptors on its skin of the ship grab and hold the hyperfield, enveloping the vessel. So long as a charged hyperfield surrounds the ship, it remains in hyperspace. Transition to normal space can be achieved either through shutting off the hyperfield (dangerous and not recommended, except for ships equipped with their own drive and able to power the field down slowly) or by passing through another hypergate. This opened the galaxy to. . .

Massive Human Colonization: Many worlds have been terraformed for human life. In a number of cases, the planets have returned the favor, leading to. . .

Human Subraces: There are a number of human subraces, subtly changed as the different environments, circumstances, and gravities of the colony worlds worked upon the settlers. The heavy-worlders of Koschei and the water-breathing albinos of Thetis are but two examples. And then there are the. . .

Aliens: Sentient, sapient aliens have been discovered -- the Blob Men of Mogo, the Crystal Intelligences of Xarvaan, and the owl-like Huur of Xib' A' Teew are the most populous. No alien race is yet a part of. . .

The Terran Hegemony: In time, a number of strong colony worlds formed alliances with Mother Earth, creating the Terran Hegemony. As time has passed, however, the colonies have become second-class citizens under the iron heel of Earth. The current Hegemon, Tsung Cain, is Emperor in all but name. The fanatically loyal Star Guard is under his direct control, and is responsible for carrying out his cruel fancies with saber and raygun. This has led to the formation of. . .

The Freedom Legion: They fight against the forces of the Hegemon, trying to overthrow the tyrant and restore true liberty to the citizens of the Hegemon. The Star Guard hunts them mercilessly through space, and any suspected collaborator is punished severely -- as is his or her family and neighbors. This has led to many refugees fleeing to places like. . .

Planet Ugarte: A small, arid world. Once a popular vacationing spot for its casinos and therapeutic Green Sands, this backwater of the Hegemony has become a gathering place for refugees, smugglers, spies, and soldiers of fortune; a hotbed of intrigue and danger, a wretched hive of scum and villainy. The Ugarte government based in Port Renault strictly controls access to its hypergate under orders from the Hegemon, but the correct authorization codes (or a ruinous bribe to corrupt officials) allow passage to. . .

The Free Colonies: Outside the harsh rule of the Hegemony, the Free Colonies stand as a beacon to the hopeful. But the Hegemon has dreams of expansion, and war is in the air. But without a strong leader to rally around, the Free Colonies will never come together for mutual defense.

What Everyone Doesn't Know

Precursor Ruins: Beneath the gray radioactive sands of Ugarte's uninhabited southern continent is a city of ancient age -- a lost spaceport of the mysterious Precursors. What lost technologies or discoveries lay hidden beneath this glowing, poisonous waste? Could strange alien beasts still stalk its subterranean streets?

Centurion: The leader of the Freedom Legion, Raymond "Flash" Rogers (codenamed "Centurion"), has escaped the maximum security prison world of Tertius and secretly made his way to Ugarte, to connect with Legionnaires and try to find passage to the Free Colonies. He is accompanied by the deadly but beautiful Wilma Arden (codename "Falcon").

Micro-Hyperdrive: Eccentric genius RP Cody, inspired by her analysis of Precursor artifacts on Ugarte, has developed an experimental hyperdrive that is smaller and more powerful than the standard . . . by a power of magnitude. The high quality of hyperfield retention increases its hyperspeed far beyond what is normally thought possible. She has installed this engine into her small space yacht, *Zeus III*, along with a few other slight modifications. . .

NPCs

Wilma Arden, aka Falcon: Known as "the Nellie Bly of the Hegemony," Wilma Arden is a crusading journalist for Gal-Net, unafraid to print the harsh truths of the Hegemony. That's why Flash Rogers approached her quietly when he discovered the black ops being run under the cover of athletic competitions. The two fell in love, only to be torn apart when Rogers was arrested by the Star Guard for treason. When the (false) news broke that Rogers had been killed in an escape attempt from the prison world of Tertius, she was disconsolate. For many months, she threw herself into her work to ease her pain. Then, while an "observer" (read "war correspondent") during the Arcadia Crisis, she fell in love with Buckminster Gordon. For several weeks, she was happy. On the eve of the Arcadia Crisis blossoming into the Arcadia Pacification, Rogers contacted her again. Caught between her two loves, she chose not to flee with Gordon (saying many things she later regretted), but to secretly join with Rogers and his Freedom Legion. She's been fighting the Hegemon ever since, with her exposes and investigative reporting, but the other shoe is about to drop: the Star Guard suspects that she is codename Falcon. She and Rogers have fled to Ugarte in an attempt to get out of Hegemony space, and find themselves trapped until they can get forged transit codes to the Free Colonies, one way or another. Her cover story is that she's on Ugarte to write an article on the upcoming Sandrace over the radioactive Great Nookrak Waste.

Dena Iridian Bey: As a penniless refugee of the pacification of New Venice, what else could archeologist Dena Iridian do but submit to the appetites of Commander Oediv, master of Port Renault? A chance meeting with Emray Bey led to xenoartifact appraisal work, which reduced her dependence upon the corrupt official. Indeed, she found herself deeply attracted to the massive smuggler lord, and six months ago, they were married. Unfortunately, Oediv is playing off of her husband's insane jealousy and blackmailing her with their secret "affair." So far, he's only wanted money, but his leers and innuendoes hint that he'd much prefer her sexual favors. She has made several striking discoveries in the Precursor Ruins, but has yet to publish any of her work, due to Oediv's attentions and the need to defend her dig sites from tomb raiders. Dena has reached a form of détente with her husband over smuggling out xenocultural artifacts: she gets to scan and study them for a one-week "holding period" before Emray allows them to be transported off-world. It's a compromise they're trying to live with. Her best friend is RP Cody.

Emray Bey: Under a different name, the Koschei heavy-worlder now known as Emray Bey backhanded a man once, killing him instantly. Unfortunately, that man was an undercover narcotics agent. Bey was sentenced to permanent transportation to the prison world Tertius. The prisoner didn't like the idea, and against all odds broke free during the passage and took over the prison shuttle. They had underestimated him: looking only at his massive frame, they didn't realize his mind was keen and his spirit, ruthless. He landed on Ugarte, and has never left. Taking the name Emray Bey, he became a simple Importer/Exporter. But that is just a façade: Bey used that brilliant mind, tremendous strength, and iron will to build a kingdom -- he is the smuggler lord of the entire sector. Every smuggled cargo in the surrounding star system is subject to "Bey's Tariff." He commands his army of thugs and triggermen from his elegant coffee- and teahouse, Bey's Samovar. Exorbitant payments to the Port Renault authorities and Bey's drive to keep a low profile have made him safe from the Hegemony's laws. His preference for subtlety, his secret heart of gold, and his insane jealousy over his new wife Dena are his only weaknesses. He is a prime mover behind the upcoming Sandrace.

Robin Penelope (RP) Cody: Eccentric genius RP Cody flunked out of Earth University as a junior, scholarship revoked and kicked to the curb due to a combination of crazy theories, illicit experiments, and bluffing down the Dean's full house with a pair of queens. It barely fazed her -- she had already plumbed the depths of what hyperspace theory her ivory tower professors could give her. She took ship with a small trade vessel, signing on as an Assistant Engineer, and commenced her practical education. She learned more about hyperdrives in the succeeding eight years

than most people learn in an entire career. After a lucrative stint as the Chief Engineer on a small smuggling vessel, she cashed in her shares, bought a small yacht of her own, and settled down on Ugarte for research of the strange Precursor ruins found there. Inspired by schematics she discovered in a hollow pillar (actually, they were only Precursor china with an intricate pattern), she tore off on a jaunt of mad science that resulted in the development of the Micro-Hyperdrive. Using her personal ship, the *Zeus III*, as a test-bed, she soon discovered that not only did her invention take up less than one-tenth the volume of a standard hyperdrive, but also increased overall hyperspeed dramatically. With enough capital to patent and put her new drive into production, she could both revolutionize space-travel and make a mint. She immediately turned to her previous profession -- smuggling -- and began transporting small, pricey lots to raise money. While she's been saving assiduously towards her eventual rise to hyperspatial industrial glory, she also spends substantially on new projects, gizmos, and gadgets. She's on excellent terms with Emray Bey (who believes her to be the Engineer and front-woman for a smuggler crew) and is close friends with his wife, Dena.

Buckminster "Buck" Gordon: He doesn't talk about his past; rumor is that Buck used to be an officer in the Star Guard, but was dishonorably discharged. After a few stints as a soldier of fortune, he struck it rich with the "discovery" and salvage of a large cargo ship believed lost in the Asteroid Sea. Flush with cash, he met Wilma Arden on the cosmopolitan Hegemony planet of Arcadia, and they fell in love. But it was not to be; as the Hegemon's forces moved to blockade the planet, she refused to flee with him in his ship, and even denied that she had felt anything for him at all. His broken heart grew a hard and crusty shell. After aimless travel through the war-torn region, he found himself on Planet Ugarte. There he opened a small casino and club, Buck's Place. He takes care of his employees in an off-handed, no-nonsense way, with gruff denials that he does anything for his people out of kindness. He is the pre-eminent information broker on Ugarte, buying and selling sensitive information, with a small sideline in weapons smuggling. He is friendly with Commander Oediv, and has respect for and a business rivalry with Emray Bey.

Karus of Xib'A'Teew, aka Lollipop: Karus is a Huur, a 4' tall humanoid birdman. He is a cobbler, producing specialty footwear for the small Huur population of Ugarte with his nimble feathered fingers. (He also has a small human clientele.) He's quiet, has a fondness for human music, and appears to be a bit of a milquetoast. Only *appears* to be, since he is in actuality one of the few non-human members of the Freedom Legion (codename Lollipop), aiding the fight against the Hegemon. He has met both Centurion and Falcon in the past. But deception is layered upon deception -- Karus is secretly an agent of the Huurian Ministry of Information: a spy. His mission is to destabilize the entire Hegemony by helping foment civil war between the Star Guard and the Freedom Legion. Then the Huurian Talon Forces can swoop in and take control of the outlying colony worlds! No one in the Freedom Legion suspects that Karus is a double agent. It should be noted that he is not a proponent of Huurian superiority (he likes humans just fine), but sees the eventual conflict in purely political terms. He does sympathize with the goals of the Legion, but all in all, he thinks that humans would be better off ruled by a Parliament of Elders rather than a Hegemon.

Commander Alexander Oediv: The commander of the Ugarte Planetary Forces (and Planetary Governor) is a dapper, corrupt, romantic man named Alexander Oediv. His command consists of 1,000 men in the UPF; a full one-third are stationed directly under him in Port Renault. He is driven by his desires -- for money, for luxury, and for titillation. Offered sufficient inducement (in large denominations), he turns a blind eye to smuggling, gambling, traitorous talk against the Hegemon, and a horde of other vices. . . and indulges in many of them himself. Currently, he's using his ability to grant or refuse egress visas to line his pockets; his blackmail against Dena Iridian Bey is mostly for personal amusement. Fond of fine arts, he is the preeminent patron of poetry, music, dance, and theater on the planet. He is friendly with Buck Gordon, spending large amounts of credits at the tables in Buck's Place; Oediv, for all his shortcomings, is a likeable rogue.

Raymond "Flash" Rogers, aka Centurion: At one time, Flash was the greatest athlete in the Terran Hegemony, a triple threat in starball, grav decathlon, and hoverpolo. Over time, with each interplanetary competition, he became aware of the oppression of the Hegemony against its colonies. Then, he discovered that one of his starball teammates was performing espionage and assassinations on the colony worlds. Flash moved to stop it, and ran afoul of the Star Guard. He escaped the prison world of Tertius, deciding to fight against the Hegemon's plots. Over time, he has gathered a small band of stalwart souls around him -- the Freedom Legion. He is fleeing Hegemony space with his lover, Wilma Arden, after a disastrous meeting with a supposed sympathizer in the upper echelons of the Star Guard

that turned out to be a trap.

Major Corbett Thomas: Valedictorian of his class at the Terran Military Academy, Corbett Thomas quickly rose through the ranks of the Star Guard. Because of his unswerving patriotism and ample talents, he has quickly made his mark. He is a brilliant tactician, skilled pilot, and a crack shot. He's also arrogant, sadistic, and enjoys the perquisites of his position a bit too much. His chivalry (or is it chauvinism?) has caused him to underestimate women in the past - especially Wilma Arden. He is a gourmet chef and connoisseur of food, and is especially fond of exotic coffees and teas. He has tangled with Flash Rogers -- who he views as a traitor to the Hegemony -- a number of times in the past; he's the man who captured Rogers and imprisoned him on Tertius. After Rogers escaped, Thomas was tapped to head the task force assigned to hunting down and thwarting the Freedom Legion. He is charged with bringing Rogers to the Hegemony, alive -- an order that has allowed Rogers to slip through his fingers more than once. He is accompanied by six of his highly trained men, but is aware that he cannot deal brusquely with Commander Oediv -- at least, not until the remainder of his team arrives on Ugarte.

NPC Matrix

The NPC Interaction Matrix is a handy tool for determining how NPCs relate to one another personally or by reputation. Use of the Matrix can aid in coming up with NPC characterizations, motivations, scenes, and adventures.

How NPC feels About:	AO	BG	CT	DIB	EB	FR	K	RPC	WA
AO	X	+	+ (-)	+	N	N	*	*	N (+) ¹
BG ²	N (+)	X	N (-)	N	N ³	N ⁴	N (+)	N	N (+!)
CT	+	N	X	* ⁵	* ⁵	-!	_ ⁵	* ⁵	_ ⁵
DIB	- (-!)	N	-	X	+!	N (+)	N	+!	* (+) ⁶
EB	N	N ³	N	+!	X	N (+)	+ (-)	+	N
FR	N (-)	N ⁴	-!	N	N	X	* (+!)	*	+(+!)
K	N	+	N (-)	N	+	* (+!)	X	*	* (+!)
RPC	*	+	-	+!	+	*	-	X	* (+) ⁶
WA	N	N (+!)	- (-!)	*	*	+ (+!)	* (+!)	*	X

Key

AO = Commander Alexander Oediv
 BG = Buckminster "Buck" Gordon
 CT = Major Corbett Thomas
 DIB = Dena Iridian Bey
 EB = Emray Bey
 FR = Raymond "Flash" Rogers
 K = Karus of Xib'A'Teew
 RPC = Robin Penelope (RP) Cody
 WA = Wilma Arden

+ = Likes
 +! = Ally
 - = Dislikes
 -! = Enemy
 * = Haven't Met
 N = No Opinion
 () = Secretly. . .
 x = Null Value

Notes

- ¹ Oediv likes all beautiful women.
- ² Buck rarely shows his emotions openly.
- ³ Friendly business rivalry, but not friends.
- ⁴ Respects his actions; resents his relationship with Wilma.
- ⁵ Underestimates aliens, human subraces, and women.
- ⁶ Likes her columns.

PC Backgrounds

Player characters probably come from one of the following groups. All need not be from the same background, however, and a character can fit into multiple groups. Note that there may be tensions between groups (say, Agents of Bey and a spy for the Hegemony) that may be the source of great in-game friction, or could utterly disrupt a game. Use caution.

Agents of Bey: Characters can work for the Ugartean crime lord as a thug, assassin, thief, bounty hunter, smuggler, or other such profession. They can be called upon for any number of illegal pursuits, but also gain a modicum of protection from their boss. Bey doesn't care about the politics or opinions of his followers (with one exception); he demands only service and loyalty to himself above all. If one of his agents is determined to have secretly been a Hegemony spy, that agent is nabbed, whisked away, and brutally beaten to death by the big man himself. The corpses are dumped in the radioactive Great Nookrak Waste, to feast the mutant scorpions that live in its sands.

Freedom Legionnaires: Secretly working towards the downfall of the Hegemon, characters in the Freedom Legion have a codename; knowledge of simple ciphers, pass-phrases, and a few members of their local cell; and a zeal for freedom and liberty. To be a Legionnaire is a crime -- even on Ugarte -- so such people should keep it close to their chest. Legionnaires may be asked to perform espionage, participate in sabotage, recruit new members, pass documents, harbor other Legionnaires, or go on covert missions.

Refugees & Expatriates: Trapped on Ugarte after fleeing from other worlds, refugees are a grab bag of character types. Nearly any profession, social status, or species can be represented here, from University professor to wealthy plumber to dispossessed aristocrat. Depending upon their finances, refugees could be scrabbling for a meal as a beggar or living it up in luxury hotels as an expatriate of leisure.

Spies (Hegemony, Free Colonies, Alien Worlds): Because of its position on the edge of Hegemony space, Ugarte is a haven for spies from all sides. Provided one has the necessary travel papers (real or forged), bribe money (small denominations, please), and a clean record (though what constitutes a "clean" record with the Hegemony is a bit dicey), the egress restrictions aren't too onerous. However, loss of papers, lack of money, or suddenly becoming notorious dumps spies into the refugee class.

Ugarte Planetary Forces (UPF) Garrison: Perhaps they're natives of Ugarte or old Star Guardsmen who've transferred their service because they're close to retirement, or maybe they just get space-sick. A UPF soldier serves as both military defender and law enforcement on Ugarte. They are called out to patrol the streets, enforce the laws, make arrests, quell riots, oversee customs, and repel planetary invasions. Commander Oediv doesn't much care about the personal politics or pursuits of his men, so long as he gets his cut. However, discovery of Freedom Legion membership (though not sympathies) is immediate discharge; discovery of being a spy from the Free Colonies or Alien Worlds merits interrogation and imprisonment; and if Oediv ever discovers that the character is secretly a Hegemony spy, well, that individual meets with an unfortunate accident.

The Usual Suspects (gamblers, smugglers, thugs, bounty hunters, assassins, fences): The Usual Suspects differ from refugees in that they are on Ugarte by choice. They differ from Bey's Agents in that they are

freelancers. The Usual Suspects can have their hand in any plot necessary -- there are always goods to be stolen, fenced, and smuggled away, and people to be extorted, roughed up, sharpened, or killed in a place like Ugarte.

Xenoarcheologists: Since Ugarte has a largish Precursor ruin upon it, many professional and amateur xenoarcheologist have come to explore. Hampered by the radioactivity and destructive sandstorms of the Great Nookrak Waste, and the assiduous expeditions of their predecessors, many leave the Scorpion City empty-handed. However, there are always rumors of additional secret tunnels, treasure troves, and even other Precursor cities percolating through the grapevine. . .

Items & Locales

Zeus III: RP Cody's highly modified space yacht. In addition to the Micro-Hyperdrive, this baby packs military-grade weaponry, hidden cargo spaces, and an ingenious point defense system, all held together with luck and a prayer.

Buck's Place: The in place to be; a combination casino and club. However, the proprietor's word is law -- if he doesn't like you, all the credits in the world won't buy you a glass of water.

Bey's Samovar: A café serving exotic coffees and teas. Bey Import/Export also has its offices in this tasteful, sturdy building. . . and Emray Bey's illegal activities are run out of its fortified basement.

Green Sands: A sheltered area of sand near Port Renault, infested with a strain of native xenobacteria who subsist on dead organic tissue and excrete a chemical that is a powerful, penetrating analgesic for most carbon-based life forms. Bury yourself in its emerald grains and let the pain melt away.

Great Nookrak Waste: A desert of gray, radioactive ash and sand. Deadly sandstorms and giant mutated insects roam here. The site of the upcoming Sandrace. Deep in the heart of the wasteland lies. . .

The Scorpion City: Ancient ruins of a race long dead before humanity reached for the stars, overrun with giant mutant scorpions and insects. While picked over by thousands of xenoarcheologists since its discovery, who know what hidden sublevels, alien technologies, or weird secrets the ruins may still hold?

Events/Subplots

Sandrace: The Sandrace is shaping up to be the event of the season. All Ugarte -- and even some tourists -- are arriving to watch this 100 mile competition over the radioactive Great Nookrak Waste. The purse is 400,000 credits; enough cash to bribe passage off the planet for four people. Will the PCs enter the race themselves or join an existing racing team, suiting up in breathers and rad-armor to brave giant bugs and knifing sandstorms to win escape from Ugarte? Maybe they're one of the teams of smugglers (either Agents of Bey or freelance), bringing in the tremendous amounts of recreational pharmaceuticals for the event? Or will they just come to gamble and cavort with the Ugartean upper crust?

Murder in Green Sands: A body is found buried in the therapeutic Green Sands; a young man carrying an incriminating letter address to (or by?) one of the PCs. Commander Oediv and his men would like to have a word with you. . .

Blackmail: Dena Iridian Bey needs the PCs' help. Commander Oediv is blackmailing her, and she has no one else to turn to. Can the PCs help her without letting Oediv squeal to Bey, or -- worse yet -- letting the jealous Bey mistakenly think they're making a play for his wife?

Signature Story Arc: "Everybody Comes to Buck's"

A Signature Story Arc is a common thread that weaves through a campaign. Subplots can come, go, or weave into the overarching story. The SSA can serve as a single mega-adventure, or be spread out over months of play. It's not necessary to use it; this campaign setting has plenty of adventure and intrigue without it. But the SSA can serve as a skeleton to create stories around. Feel free to alter, edit, or warp the SSA in ways that are personally pleasing; we've all seen this story before, the fun is to tweak it a little (and follow the tweaks that the existence of the PCs put on it).

The following Episodes A through E detail two things: 1) what will happen without PC involvement, and 2) opportunities for PC involvement in the Episode. GM only information appears in [square brackets].

Note that PCs can and should impact the Episodes, otherwise, they're just passengers on the GM's railroad. The PC Involvement sections indicate ways for PCs to enter the plot-in-progress; their actions will affect how the SSA plays out afterward. To aid the GM, SSA Advice is offered below the Episode descriptions.

Episode A

Courier Killed

What Happens

A Hegemony courier is killed while bearing two letters of transit, allowing free passage to the bearer, signed by the Hegemon himself. These two objects are the ultimate "Get Out of Jail Free!" cards, and everybody wants one, or both. [Karus killed the courier and stole the letters.]

PC Involvement

Perhaps Karus needed some help in dispatching the courier? Of course, he'd never tell them what the true objective was; how would the PCs feel when they discover they held a fortune/freedom in their hands and it slipped away? Or perhaps the PCs of the UPF Garrison are detailed to help solve the murder?

Episode B

Arrivals

What Happens

A striking couple debarks at Port Renault -- journalist Wilma Arden and her handsome and oddly familiar companion [Flash Rogers]. They quickly jet out to the lodgings near the Great Nookrak Wastes, since Ms. Arden is here to cover the Sandrace for Gal-Net. [Flash and Wilma are here to meet contact Karus and receive the stolen letters of transit.] Karus arrives at Buck's Place, and has a private tête-à-tête with Buck Gordon. [Karus asks Buck to hold the letters for him; Buck agrees.] Later that evening, Major Corbin Thomas of the Star Guard lands; he and his six men meet with Commander Alexander Oediv. [Thomas is hunting the stolen letters and also chasing Flash, his orders are to bring him, alive, to the Hegemon; Oediv says that he knows who stole the letters, and will seize him at the Sandrace the next day.]

PC Involvement

Flash and Wilma need to get out to the Sandrace, so they'll need transport. If a PC recognizes Flash, that's information, and information is worth money -- but should it be sold to Buck, Bey, or Oediv? All of the fast set are on their way out to the Sandrace -- some may need pilots, porters, companions, or bodyguards. Or if the PCs are racing, they'll have a change to mingle both before and after the Sandrace.

Episode C

Sandrace

What Happens

Buck travels out to watch the Sandrace; some of his employees come along to set up a bookmaking/betting/refreshments pavilion. Karus is captured by the UPF. [Karus doesn't have the letters.] Oediv introduces Thomas to Buck; Thomas runs down Buck's history, trying and failing to get his goat. Thomas also advises Buck not to even think about helping Flash escape. Flash & Wilma enter the pavilion. The sight of Wilma takes Buck aback momentarily; Thomas confronts Flash, and tells him to come to Oediv's office in the afternoon for questioning. Flash agrees. [Then Flash runs out to set up a Freedom Legion meeting; Wilma leaves shortly after to find Karus.] Buck gets drunk.

PC Involvement

If the PCs are with Karus, they'll have to avoid capture too; after that, they may need to escape prison or help bust the alien out. If they're UPF Garrison, they'll be trying to capture and hold Karus. Freedom Legionnaires may be sticking close by Flash and Wilma to protect them at the Sandrace; afterwards there is a need to get the word out about a Freedom Legion meeting for the next night. Sandracers are oblivious to all the action in the pavilion, being too busy racing and fighting off giant scorpions. Wilma will approach smuggler and pilot types once Karus is known to be in the clink; she's looking for passage for two (high-profile people) off Ugarte.

Episode D

Prisons, Rumors, & Bargains

What Happens

Overnight, Karus is interrogated and suffers a mysterious accident or commits suicide, Oediv hasn't determined which. [Oediv suspects Buck has the letters.] The next day, back in Port Renault, Emray Bey and Buck discuss the letters of transit in general terms. [Bey suspects that Buck has them.] Flash is questioned by Oediv and Thomas, and is informed that the only place he's going is straight to the Hegemon, when the rest of Thomas's men arrive. Flash and Wilma then meet with Bey, trying to arrange passage out. [Bey hints that Buck has the letters.] Flash comes alone to bargain with Buck for the letters. [Buck tells him to take a hike, and hints at his past with Wilma.] Flash convenes the Legionnaires meeting. [Which will be broken up by the UPF and Thomas' six men.] Wilma comes to try and get the letters from Buck. [She fails, and they admit their love for each other. Wilma offers to stay with Buck if he gets Flash off Ugarte.] Wilma leaves; Flash returns, wounded and running from the law. He once again bargains with Buck, this time, trying to get Buck to use the letters to get himself and Wilma away. [Buck is impressed with Flash's devotion in the face of death.] Oediv and Thomas appear with their men, and capture Flash.

PC Involvement

They could break Karus out before his "accident." They could be hired/ordered by Bey or Oediv to ransack Buck's Place looking for the letters. Legionnaires can fight the UPF and the Star Guard at the interrupted meeting, and escape to regroup.

Episode E

Escape From Ugarte

What Happens

Buck tells Oediv he has the letters, and plans on using them to get away with Wilma. But he wants Flash out of the way. They concoct a frame-job that will make it seem like Flash was killed attempting escape (much like Karus). Flash busts out of prison and runs for Buck, thinking that Buck will be using the letters to escape with Wilma. Wilma shows

up, thinking that Flash will use the letters and escape, while she stays with Buck. Oediv comes along to shoot Flash once he grabs the letters. [Buck turns the tables on all of them, and takes them to the shuttle port. Oediv surreptitiously tips off Thomas.] Buck tells Flash and Wilma to get on the shuttle; he tells Wilma that if she doesn't go with Flash, she'll regret it eventually. [A lie, to aid her tearing herself away from Buck.] They get on the shuttle. [Oediv's romantic nature is inspired by Buck's selfless act.] Thomas shows up; Buck duels him and eventually runs him through. Buck decides to join the fight against the Hegemon, and Oediv decides to go with him.

PC Involvement

The PCs could help break Flash out of prison or try to keep him there (working against Oediv's secret assistance). A pitched battle at the shuttle port between the Star Guard and the Freedom Legion, with Agents of Bey's trying to swoop in and steal the letter would seem apropos.

SSA Advice

First off, the SSA is intended to be a coat-rack for the PCs to hang their jackets on. If it's taking up too much space (read: spotlight time), feel free to throw it out. Maybe giant Scorpions attack Buck's pavilion at the Sandrace, and chow down on a number of named NPCs. Deviation from the "What Happens" is encouraged, if not mandatory.

That being said, if one wishes to use the SSA, the following advice may come in handy:

Pacing: If a multi-session campaign, the first session should be unrelated to the SSA, and serve to introduce the players to Planet Ugarte and its denizens. Any of the Events/subplots would work well here. In terms of timing Episodes, A, B, and C should follow each other closely. A subplot or one-off adventure can fit between C and D. Episodes D and E should follow each other within 12 hours.

NPC Choices: Four of the NPCs have hard choices to make. When PC involvement changes the "What Happens" status quo, keep their choices in mind. Buck must choose between staying on Ugarte with Wilma, fleeing Ugarte with Wilma, or letting Flash and Wilma escape. Flash must choose between fleeing with Wilma or sending Wilma away with Buck. Wilma must choose between Buck (and love) or Flash (and his fight against the Hegemon). Oediv must choose between his comfort and his romantic ideals.

Monkeywrenches: What if Buck loses the letters of transit? Well, he may go seek out RP Cody and her speedy little ship. What if Karus escapes to live another day? Perhaps Buck returns the letters to him, no questions asked. What if Flash dies during the Star Guard assault on the Freedom Legion meeting? Maybe someone takes his place -- Buck, Wilma, or Oediv. What if a Freedom Legion PC whacks Thomas? Well, then his second-in-command -- a nasty piece of work named Redav -- comes to Ugarte to take over. The possibilities are -- and should be -- endless! Again, use the SSA as a jumping off point to tell your own stories, be they interspersed within the SSA or completely divergent.

Mirror, Mirror: What if Major Corbett Thomas is really the good guy of this piece, and Flash and Wilma are indeed rabble-rousing revolutionaries against the gentle and kind rulership of the Hegemon? Now you've got a flawed (Terran chauvinism) hero, with a corrupt world up against him.

Customization Notes

Space Tech: The important things are that 1) egress from Ugarte is restricted not just politically, but technologically, and 2) RP Cody can ignore the technological restrictions.

Precursor Ruins: Replace the Precursors and their ruins with a rare and valuable -- but enigmatic -- native animal or animals and its remote habitat. Xenoarcheologists become xenobiologists. RP Cody is inspired by the scale patterns, social hierarchy, or neurological system of the critter instead of Precursor dinnerware.

Government: The most important things are that 1) the Hegemony should be a little oppressive, and 2) Ugarte should be semi-autonomous.

Other Resources

- Flash Gordon and His Universal Serial Compatriots <http://members.iquest.net/~taldr/>
- The Space Hero Files <http://www.slick-net.com/space/text/>
- Casablanca <http://www.filmsite.org/casa.html>
- Othello, the Moor of Venice -- <http://www.bartleby.com/70/index44.html>

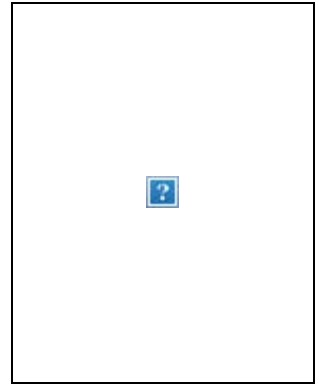
Pyramid Review

Legends & Lairs: Mythic Races

Published by [Fantasy Flight Games](#)

Line Developer Greg Benage

176 b&w pages; \$24.95



Mythic Races follows hot on the heels of the hardcover *Traps & Treachery*. Like that book, there is a focused effort by Fantasy Flight Games to expand the *d20* OGL system in ways that aren't receiving a lot of support. In this case, it's the introduction of almost 30 new races.

The races in the book run from races comparable to standard elves and dwarves like the Coivalds (short and stout forest guardians), the water-based ooloi, and the strong-yet-slow tremen. There are more powerful races like the Aaleear, a race physically similar to the halflings of old (as in "short and fat"), and the very powerful Stonegrunts, creatures created by the dwarves in times long past.

Each race has background information followed by personality, physical description, relations, alignment, lands, religion, language, names, specific names, adventurers, racial traits (including level equivalency), and prestige classes associated with the race. The most important parts for mini-maxers are how well the racial traits which include special abilities, balance out with the level equivalency. The level equivalency is a trait that shows how powerful such a creature is. For example, a race with a +1 level equivalency is equal to a 2nd level character.

Just for reference, there are ten with a 0 level, which is supposed to equal the races in the players handbook and minor creatures like orcs, seven races at LE +1, four at LE +2, five at LE +3, and one at LE +4. GMs will have to tinker with the LEs to insure that these races are indeed balanced, as there are few examples of races with higher LEs outside of the *Forgotten Realms* hardcover for *Dungeons & Dragons 3rd Edition*.

One of the most important aspects about these new races is that they are minor players in the grand scheme of things. Take the Luminous, a race of humanoids composed of energy. They battled against evil and lost almost all their numbers. This makes them very rare, and thus easy to insert into, say, a *Scarred Lands* campaign where they can use their favored class of Paladin to good advantage in a place like Mithril. Other races make their homes in dangerous terrain, like the quissians who dwell in the desert, or the ooloi who live under the sea. These factors help insure that while the races are playable and explainable, each campaign isn't like *Star Wars'* famous Cantina scene.

Not satisfied with merely giving the GM and players new races, each race has its own prestige class or classes as well. In most cases, these are variants on the traditional roles with a racial twist. The shtak, a desert dwelling race, has the shtak windrider, a type of holy warrior. The powerful stonegrunts have the siege grunt, a class designed to defend or take down fortifications. Most of the classes follow the standard ones in the *Dungeon Masters Guide* in that they have ten levels, but some (like the ooloi journeyman) have only five. In almost all cases, the requirement to be one of these elite classes is being of the race where the class is introduced . . . no non-curst trying to be curst soulless.

Most of the game mechanics seem fairly sound, but there are some that may make a few raise their eyebrows. For example, one race, the Eleti, is an undead race. However, these creatures have a prestige class that gains 1d6 hit points per level. The problem is that undead, as a rule, gain 1d12 hit dice per level.

There are a few things keeping this book from being top-notch. The first is that there are four pages of advertising in its 176 pages. (For comparison's sake, *Relics & Rituals* from Sword & Sorcery Studios is the same price, with 224 pages and two pages of advertisements.) This is especially strange since there is no index, which would be useful to

list the feats, spells, and other miscellaneous information in the book.

Another minor weakness is the lack of charts and tables. There should be a chart for Level Equivalency similar to the *Monster Manual's* chart for Challenge Rating. Such a table would allow players and GMs to reference quickly how powerful each race is. In addition, a table that gave a brief summary of each race and the prestige classes available to them, would further aid the usefulness of this book.

These are very minor issues though. The book is worth the funds for any player seeking to be something just a little different, or any GM wishing to make his world just a little different.

(Fantasy Flight Games has also made three extra races available online at <http://www.fantasyflightgames.com/1l.html>)

--*Joe G. Kushner*

Pyramid Review

Lord of the Rings: The Search Boardgame

Published by [Rio Grande Games](#)

Written by Peter Neugebauer

Illustrated by John Howe

\$19.95

Over the years Tolkien's Middle Earth has been the inspiration for numerous boardgames, two RPGs (with a third on the way) and a CCG (with a second also on the way). The latest boardgame to join this list is *Lord of the Rings: The Search*, a semi-sequel to *The Hobbit*, also from Rio Grande games.

The Search is a two-player game designed for players aged ten and over. It is described as an "exciting tile-laying and exploring game," but really it is a tile-laying exploring game that ends in a race! Each player controls a Hobbit, either Frodo or Sam (appropriately enough as they are the last two Ring Bearers), as they lay down tiles to create a map of Middle Earth and then search it for both the Ring and the location of Mount Doom. Once both are found, they race to be the first to the mountain where they can dispose of the Ring.

The game comes in an eight-inch square box, an inch deep. Inside are forty-eight land tiles; eight encounter tokens each for water (colored blue), fields (colored yellow) and forests (colored brown); twenty brown encounter tokens for mountain regions; two boat tokens; one Mount Doom standee; and two plastic hobbit figures -- one yellow for Frodo and one blue-green for Sam. The quality of the components is good; both tokens and tiles are painted on 1/16th inch thick card and given a matt finish. Only the Hobbit figures disappoint. The identical figures are rather rough, lack detail, and have a lot of flash on them. All of these components fit neatly into the games' storage tray, which sits snugly into the box. The full-color rules run to eight clearly written pages.

At the start of the game, the land tile representing the Shire is placed down, and all of the tokens and tiles are shuffled into their correct piles. Players draw three land tiles each and decide whether they want to be Sam or Frodo. Frodo goes first. The game itself is broken into three phases.

In Phase One, players alternate placing land tiles until a three by three cross has been formed centering upon the Shire. Each approximately two-inch square land tile is divided into four triangular sections depicting the water, mountain, forest, and field terrain of Middle Earth. As the game progresses tiles are put down to form a six-by-eight grid with the Shire at the center. Tiles must be placed so that its terrain sections match those of the tiles it is placed adjacent to. Thus forest sections must be put next to other forest sections and so on. If a player cannot legally place a tile down because sections do not match, the tile is flipped and its gray reverse put down as a neutral tile. Through tile placement, adjacent terrain sections build to form regions that regulate encounters and movement.

Once the three by three cross has been formed the first Phase ends and the second begins. In Phase Two, a player's turn consists of drawing and laying a single tile, moving their Hobbit, and drawing another tile. If by placing a tile, they create a region made up of just two terrain sections, this becomes an encounter space and it receives an encounter token of the appropriate color. Blue, green, and yellow tokens are placed face up and brown tokens face down. Movement is from one adjacent region to another, whatever the size of the regions involved. Boats are needed if a Hobbit wants to cross any water regions.

When a Hobbit moves into a region containing a blue, green, or yellow encounter token, they collect the token and

keep it face down before them. These represent allies and objects -- Gandalf, Gollum, The Ring, Elven Rope, Legolas, the other Hobbits and so on -- that can be used in combat, to affect a Hobbit's movement, or even give himself an immediate extra turn! None of the encounter tokens can be used to affect the other player, and once a token has been used, it cannot be used again.

Brown encounter tokens are only found in Mountain regions and represent either an empty cave -- these can be saved and used to purchase the use of a boat or an actual enemy to be fought! Enemy tokens are marked with a single dot for Orcs, Orc Chieftains and Trolls; and two dots for the Balrog and Shelob. The number of dots represents how many turns of movement a Hobbit loses while he is in combat, though he can still draw and lay tiles down. Alternatively, a player can negate each dot an enemy has by spending one of the allied encounter tokens he holds per dot. Once these tokens have been spent, they are out of the game. While there are several Orc and Troll encounters, there is thankfully only one each of the Balrog or Shelob tokens.

Phase Two ends once all of the tiles have been put down. Mount Doom is located in the last neutral tile placed or the last tile put down if the map has no neutral tiles. Then both players take turns to race to Mount Doom, moving as normal. The game ends when a Hobbit gets to the mountain. Both players now add up the points earned as they have played the game. These are awarded for each blue, green and yellow held at the end of the game, for each creature defeated, but deducted for each blue, green and yellow spent in combat or on a boat. Additional points can be won for reaching Mount Doom, more if you have the Ring and Gollum in tow. The highest score wins the game.

The strategy to *The Search* lies in tile placement, with players trying to control encounter token location to their advantage. Likewise, creating larger regions makes movement easier. Offsetting this is the random order in which the tokens appear in the game. Since water regions can hamper movement, it pays to explore mountain regions for the Empty Cave tokens that can be spent to buy a boat. Similarly, the Enemy Tokens are worth facing for their value in scoring at the end of the game. While Phase Three is the race to Mount Doom, another race occurs earlier in the game when the Ring appears -- getting to Mount Doom with both it and Gollum is worth a lot of extra points.

Lord of the Rings: The Search is neither too shallow for adult players nor too difficult for its intended younger players. Indeed, eight- or nine-year-olds could enjoy this game with a little help from a more experienced player. A game should only last forty minutes (less with practice), and it is playable almost right out of the box. As a Middle Earth game it is a little abstract, and perhaps there could have been more interaction between the players, but it does model the search in a fun way. Fans of Middle Earth should enjoy the chance to control one of the two Ring Bearers, and as a two-player game, ***Lord of the Rings: The Search*** is easy to get out, set up, and play. With the forthcoming release of the film, it not only offers good value for money, it makes an excellent gift for any fan.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

Zombies!!! Boardgame



Published by [Journeyman Press](#)

Boxed game; \$19.95

It's an old story: Boy meets girl, boy and girl get surrounded by the undead, boy and girl make a run for the first ride out of town. It's been told many times before, and now you get to determine the outcome in *Zombies!!!*

You and five friends are trapped in a small city . . . in the town square, to be precise. This little hamlet isn't so small that it can't afford first-class transportation, however -- there's a helipad just waiting to whisk you away to safety, if you can beat back the hordes of unliving standing between you and it.

Only one of you is going to make it, though, and you won't know exactly where the heliport is until the end. Until then, you must navigate the maze of streets and storefronts to find enough supplies to keep you going. Get surrounded, and you'll find yourself back at square one in a literal sense.

Square one is the Town Square. Everyone starts on the center space, shotguns ready. Each turn, a player pulls a map tile from the map deck. These geomorphic 9-square tiles depict city streets, shops, and town features, and they fit together to form the town. The player connects the tile to the existing map and adds an appropriate number of zombies. For a street add as many zombies as there are street exits (i.e., four zombies for a four-way intersection tile). If the tile is a shop or some sort of important building, it will tell you how many of the undead are inside.

Now that you know where you're going and who's in your way, you can have at it. You roll one six-sided die for movement and start wading in. Everyone starts with three Life tokens and three Bullet tokens. When confronted with a zombie, you roll the six-sider again. A four, five, or six kills the creature outright and you get to add him to your collection. If you roll a one, two, or three, you have a choice of discarding a Life token and fighting the combat again, or spending enough Bullet tokens to raise your roll to a four. (So if you roll a two, you'll have to spend two Bullet tokens to make the roll a four.) You can keep moving and fighting (or retreating and running) as long as you're willing and able, but once your movement runs out it's the zombies' turn. Another roll of the die tells you how many zombies get to move one space each.

Once you've begun a combat with a zombie, you must fight to the -- uh, relocation. Either you kill it, or you run out of Life tokens trying to do so. No one dies completely in the game (which seems apropos), but if you run out of Life tokens, you get sent back to the town square, usually a bad place to be since the town is growing around you. On the minus side, your movement ends, you lose half the zombies you've killed, and you lose any weapons you may have had; on the plus side, you get your starting tokens back.

The weapons come from event cards, as do other effects. You get three cards to start with, and you may refill your hand midway through your turn. You only get to play one card each round (from the beginning of your turn to the beginning of your next turn), so you have to decide whether it will be a card in your favor or one that will stick it to your opponents (the other players, not the zombies). You can discard a card at the end of your turn if you want to open up a space for better cards when you refill, but the card you get rid of may become useful between now and then.

Some event cards are just weapons, like a shotgun or a fire axe, while others allow for different effects on game play, like moving zombies around or preventing them from attacking altogether. Still others improve your own movement. Often there's a prerequisite for playing a card -- a fire axe may only be added to your arsenal if you're in the fire station, and first aid kits must be retrieved from the hospital or the drug store.

There are very good reasons to go into the "named" buildings, and some very good reasons not to. Aside from their effect on the play of event cards, each named building has a code -- the Lawn & Garden Store, for example, says Z-6 L-2 B-3 -- that tells you how many zombies, Life tokens and Bullet tokens must be placed there. It's a good way to get the stuff you need, and an even better way to get yourself smothered by the walking dead.

Since it's possible to close off the town to where additional tiles (including the helipad) cannot be played, and since the players will probably end up scattered all over a zombie-rich board, there are two ways to win. If you're the first player to reach the center square of the helipad tile, you win. Alternately, if you are the first player to rack up 25 zombie kills (you get to keep a stack of them in front of you), you win.

The game is a sharp piece of design, with moody artwork, amusing card titles, nice miniatures (including a honkin'-big pile of zombies), and crisp, clean map tiles, all wrapped around a simple and enjoyable set of rules. The only real trouble with the game is that it plays slowly. The pace picks up after being played a few times, but games can easily reach the 2-hour-plus mark as vicious backstabbing takes its toll on your score and your freedom of activity. On another level this works to the game's advantage; between the duplicity and the never-ending swarms of enemies, the suffocating feel of zombie stories is palpable.

Still, at a mere \$19.95, there's a lot of fun fat-packed into the little box. The zombie figures -- 100 of them -- with all their little details are worth that much, and you get 6 Shotgun Guys, a pair of dice, 50 event cards, 30 map tiles, and 90 tokens as well. An army installation sequel has been promised for winter, and the game looks to have plenty of room for house rules, expansions and play variants. If Journeyman Press keeps up this kind of quality fun, *Zombies!!!* is going to be hard to stop.

(Editor's note: This review was submitted before news of [Journeyman Press' closing.](#))

--Andy Vetromile

Let Me Introduce You To . . .

- "A little more than kin, and less than kind."
- "Face it, tiger . . . You just hit the **jackpot!**"
- "Saigon. Shit."

Done correctly, an introduction can be one of the most important and interesting things you'll do in an RPG, either as a player *or* a GM.

After all, an international superspy whose first words are, "I'm Chuck Storm: built for danger." is probably more intriguing than one who says, "You gonna eat that?"

GMs definitely have an easier time when it comes to introductions. After all, they can guide the setting and scene exactly to the point where it would make their important characters look as cool (or not) as necessary. Would a car accident let the grease monkey mechanic use spit and prayer to fix the vehicle? Well, it's easy to create one. Need a gala ball to show off the femme fatales' social skills? Piece of cake. Would a timely intervention help the heroes trust the new NPC, helping to set the stage for his betrayal? Not a problem!

Meanwhile, most players generally don't have a firm idea *what* shape their character is going to take until they start playing. This can be especially difficult in a new setting or system, where players may be unfamiliar with the rules and game conventions. "I'm Strom Axgrinder, and I'm the toughest in the land! (Presuming I'm reading this Damage section right, that is . . .)" Even if they did, they usually don't have much control over that opening scene the GM produces; too often they're along for the ride.

Of course, this isn't always the case. If the GM gives an idea as to what the opening scene will be, the players should be able to prepare a bit more. For example, in a *Fading Suns* LARP I was in at DragonCon this year, the action took place in an auction, with the introduction to the auction being the first "official" scene. One player waited until midway through the auctioneer's opening speech, then entered the room, talking on a cell phone (or the 51st century equivalent thereof) about how much his benefactors wanted him to bid. It was a great obnoxious touch that did wonders to establish his character immediately.

Giving the players more control over the setting -- especially in some opening segments -- can allow for a more natural and authentic "introduction." For example, I ran a *Star Trek* game where the first scene took place on a ship party. I declared the affair "mildly official," and suggested that the heroes could dress as casual or formal as they wanted, and arrive when they wanted. So the fastidious captain was there before everyone else, dressed in full Starfleet regalia and helping to set up and chastising those who "got it wrong," while the second-in-command (who had 12 kids) arrived late, in a sweater, with a crying little one tugging on his sleeves.

Carrying this further, some games allow for the possibility of the players to write their own opening scenes. In a game which uses an opening script (like many cinematic games allow), the players and GM could collaborate on that first script, making sure that everyone is happy with that "first moment." Or a group story could hash out those all-important opening scenes. Of course, this removes all the spontaneity from that first session, which many groups wouldn't like.

An alternative to this technique is to have the players develop their own "opening lines" (ideally with some context) so the GM can weave those together into either a script or a loose opening adventure.

GM: "The scene opens on a street corner. A middle-aged man is trying to get away from an ill-kept man standing on the street corner, shouting . . ." [points to Player 1]

Player 1: "Do not deny the truth in your heart. The end is nigh! Today, tomorrow, you'll never know. But mark my words . . . the end is nigh!"

GM: "The middle-aged man is taken aback, and backs up into the street. The commotion causes traffic to screech to a halt, including a taxi where two people are arguing . . ." [points to Player 2]

Player 2: "Do you have any idea who you are dealing with? *I* am Alexander Trust, head of the Trust Foundation! Cross me again, and you *will* regret it."

GM: "Meanwhile someone uses the distraction to steal a woman's purse. A young female officer pursues, gun drawn, and says . . ." [points to Player 3]

Player 3: "[BLAM! BLAM!] Damn. Um . . . Stop or I'll shoot! [looks around at bystanders] You didn't see that right? Huh?"

And so on. This method maintains some of the spontaneity, while making sure the players are able to make that all-important first impression.

And a good first impression can go a long way towards establishing a new campaign on the right foot from scene one.

* * *

When I first started looking for a replacement column or feature way back in November of last year, I made a promise to myself (and probably on the message boards): I wasn't going to find another columnist just for the sake of finding another columnist. In my mind, the purpose of a monthly column or feature is for it to be better than whatever would be taking its place; it doesn't make any sense to have a recurring feature that isn't as good as other random articles.

So shortly after it became known that we were looking for new columns, I was inundated with proposals.

I was also pulled by seemingly contradictory demands of the readership. We ran a poll at the time that asked:

Which of these new monthly column ideas most appeals to you?

20% wanted "GM advice."

20% wanted campaign world creation advice.

19% wanted rotating genre advice.

These seemed fairly contradictory, or so I thought. And it seemed clear that I wouldn't be able to satisfy everyone (although 15% of you said you didn't care, so long as it's good . . . bless your hearts).

Anyway, one of the proposals was from Chad Underkoffler. He submitted a pitch called "Campaign in a Box." In it he detailed how he would come up with a new setting each month, complete with NPCs, adventure ideas, and genre advice for that campaign world. He also submitted a 3,500 word sample (bigger than the normal 2000 words I was looking for) because he wanted "to start out with a bang."

And I rejected it.

Now, to be fair, I didn't reject it outright. But stylistically I was afraid it would step on the toes of Ken Hite's *Suppressed Transmission*. After all, Ken already had a gift for presenting odd campaigns every so often.

But I did a compromise: I accepted the submission as a regular article, with the promise that, if it was well-received, I would run another. So he resubmitted a 5,000-word version (dubbed "[Futura City, The City of Tomorrow](#)"), and I ran it.

And it was well-received.

So I ran another, a 5,000-word piece called "[Psi, Psi West](#)". And although (ratings-wise) it wasn't as well-received, it still did well. More importantly, several people on the [message boards](#) had something interesting to say:

"I normally don't like Wild West games, but I was glad I read this article."

Bingo.

See, one of my personal criteria for a columnist is that, even if you don't like the subject matter, you should still be able to get something out of the column. It should still be interesting to read. (It's a philosophy I try to follow with my own column.) Which is why I consider Harlan Ellison's *Watching* to be one of the best essay books I've ever read, even though I've only seen a handful of the movies reviewed in there. You don't *need* to see the movies. The essays themselves are rewarding.

And so it seems with Chad's submissions. And I realize that's possibly because there is something for everyone. A campaign, NPC descriptions, adventure seeds, genre advice . . . it's all in there.

So I'm proud to introduce the first feature column I've added since I became editor, with Chad Underkoffler's "Campaign in a Box."

Now, not one to leave well enough alone, I noted that Chad seemed to do best with the longer format. If I *did* give him a monthly column, would the 2,000 word format be as good and "meaty?" I decided I didn't want to take that chance, so instead I'm giving him a bimonthly slot, with 4-6,000 words. Hopefully those who don't like columns will view it as a bimonthly interruption, and those who *do* like this addition will have something to look forward to every other month.

Of course, commentary on this new addition to our family is more than welcome. You can send comments to me at pyramid@sjgames.com, or visit our [discussion boards](#).

* * *

Sadly, both John Kovalic and Ken Hite were busy completing Secret Projects this week, so they needed to skip. (Although we don't *think* it was the same project, you never can tell . . . It's never best to inquire too deeply into the affairs of the Hidden Masters.) Hopefully they'll be back next week as we wrap up our Halloween horror festivities.

--Steven Marsh

* * *

*Last week's answer: **Fate of Istus**, p. 119.*

(One star) "Example: It is Bob's turn, and he needs one brick to build a road. He has two lumber and three ore. Bob asks: 'Who will give me one brick for one ore?'"

Just testing this sucka. Again.

Frag Zombies!!!

A Set of Rules for Combining *Frag* and *Zombies!!!*

by Philip Reed

"Frag Zombies!!!" is a rule set that combines Steve Jackson Games' computerless first-person shooter *Frag* with Journeyman Press' B-movie action boardgame *Zombies!!!*. To use these rules you will need both games. The *Frag* expansion *Death Match*, while useful (for the extra *Frag* cards), is not necessary to play.

Frag Zombies!!! is played with primarily the *Frag* rules though the zombies, humans, Map Tiles, and Card Event Deck from *Zombies!!!* are all used during play. When these rules conflict with the *Frag* rules these rules take precedence.

Game Components

To play *Frag Zombies!!!* you will be using:

- *Frag* rules
- *Zombies!!!* Map Tiles
- *Zombies!!!* Event Card Deck
- *Frag* Weapon and Gadget Card Decks
- *Zombies!!!* zombie figures and "pawns"
- Zombies Life and Bullet Tokens
- Lots of six-sided dice
- A copy of the *Frag* Fighter Sheet for each player. Go [here](#) for a free PDF.
- These rules.

Setup

All players roll to see who goes first (as in the *Frag* rules). The winner also removes the Heliport and Town Square tiles from the Map Tiles. As in *Zombies!!!*, the Town Square is placed in the center of the table and the Heliport is placed at the bottom of the Map Tiles after they are shuffled and placed face down.

The Weapons, Gadgets, and *Zombies!!!* Event Deck are shuffled and each player is dealt one card from each deck. The *Frag* Specials cards are not used in *Frag Zombies!!!* and should be set out of the way. The following cards are removed from the Gadget deck.

Gadgets

- Energy Reflector
- Energy Shield
- Fireproof Coating
- Personal Teleporter
- Phase Shift
- Power Leap

Each player selects a pawn and places it in the center space on the Town Square tile. This is the only space in the game

Using *Death Match* with *Frag Zombies!!!*

All of the specials are, of course, removed from play. You must also remove the following cards from the decks before play begins.

Weapons

- Mine Dropper
- Tranquilizer Pistol

Gadgets

- Heat Shield
- Key Cards (all colors)
- Wall? What Wall?

None of the *Death Match* rules should be used in a *Frag Zombies!!!* game.

where more than one player is allowed to be at a time. This is also the only respawn point where fragged players reappear as the game progresses.

Sequence of Play

Each turn a player may do each of the following (in order):

- *Check for Respawn:* If you are currently fragged and out of play, respawn in the center space at Town Square.
- *Place New Map Tile:* Map Tiles are placed in play exactly as they are in **Zombies!!!**; see the **Zombies!!!** rules for details.
- *Movement/Power-Up/Attack:* As in **Frag**, this may happen in any order until the player runs out of movement and attacks. See box "Power-Ups" for how powering up works in **Frag Zombies!!!** Movement is modified from the standard **Frag** rules (see below) while attacking works in the same way as **Frag**.
- *Zombies Move:* The player to the right of the current player rolls 1d6 and moves that many zombies one space on the game board.
- *Zombies Attack:* Any zombies in spaces adjacent to the fighter (or in the same space) automatically attack now. The player to the right of the current player handles any zombie attacks for this turn. See **Zombies**, below, for detailed information on zombie combat and other tasty rules regarding zombies.
- *Finish:* Tell the next player that it's his turn. As in **Frag**, play proceeds clockwise.

Movement

Unlike **Frag**, fighters in **Frag Zombies!!!** only move a number of spaces during their turn equal to their Speed attribute. This distance can be modified with Gadget and/or Event Cards. There is no jumping in **Frag Zombies!!!**

Unlike in **Zombies!!!**, moving into a space with a zombie does not stop your movement. As in **Frag**, you may move through these occupied spaces.

Doors in **Frag Zombies!!!** are always open and do not block LOS. How else would all of those zombies be loose in so many buildings at once?

Movement is otherwise treated identically as in **Frag**.

Zombies

Zombie Pool: The zombie pool is the number of zombies remaining to be placed on the map tiles. At the start of the game, the zombie pool is all 100 plastic zombies included in the **Zombies!!!** game. As zombies are placed on the map tiles the pool decreases. Fragged zombies do not return to the pool but are instead hoarded by the player who made the frag. Fragging zombies is one of the ways to win the game (see **Winning the Game**, below).

Zombies in Combat: All zombies have Health 1 and can only attack an opponent in an adjacent space (they have no ranged attack abilities). Zombies do not roll dice to hit (all zombie attacks are automatic hits) and they roll 2 dice for damage.

Zombie Stacking: Unlike the fighters, any number of zombies may end a turn in a space or may even end a turn in the same space as a fighter. The cards *This Isn't So Bad* and *Zombie Master* may not be used to stack zombies in a space.

The **Zombies!!!** Card Event Deck

Power-Ups

On the standard **Frag** maps power-ups are indicated on the map with a gadget or weapon symbol. **Frag Zombies!!!** uses a similar method but since it is played on the **Zombies!!!** Map Tiles the Life and Bullet tokens from the game are used instead of the **Frag** power-up symbols.

To use Life and Bullet tokens place them on a newly drawn tile as you would in a normal game of **Zombies!!!** A player moving over a space with a Life or Bullet token rolls for power-up as he normally would in **Frag** using life tokens as gadget spaces and bullet tokens as weapon spaces. These tokens are removed from play whenever a player successfully powers-up using one of them.

In *Frag Zombies!!!*, the **Zombies!!!** Card Event Deck takes the place of the Frag specials deck. Each player starts with one card from the Card Event Deck and earns an additional card for each zombie frag they make. Fragging other players does not earn a player cards. As in *Frag*, a player may not have more than five cards in his hand at the end of his turn. A player may have, in play, no more than 3 cards from the Event Deck at any time. Activating one of these in play cards does not count as playing a card for that turn.

A lot of the cards in **Zombies!!!** are easy to use with the *Frag* rules and don't require any special rules. For those cards and rules that do need some modification and clarification for a *Frag* game, the following will come in handy.

Generic Rules Applicable to Many Cards

- **Combat Roll:** When a **Zombies!!!** card states "add +X to a combat roll" add that number to the fighter's Accuracy for the number of combat rolls specified on the card. *Example:* Hey Look . . . A Shotgun! states "Target player gets a +1 to their next 3 combat rolls." which means, in *Frag Zombies!!!*, the player gains a +1 to his next three attack rolls.
- **Double Movement:** Cards that state "double movement" must be played at the beginning of a turn before movement. The player simply doubles his movement for that turn.

Rules for Specific Cards

Butter Fingers -- Play at any time. The target player must discard one card from his hand or already in play. Discard after use.

Chainsaw -- Play only when you are in the Lawn and Garden Center. For the remainder of the game you are considered to have a chainsaw weapon card in play that does not count against your weapon limit. Take one Chainsaw card from the weapon deck and place it beside your record sheet.

First Aid Kit -- Play only when you are in the Hospital or Drug Store. Roll 1d6 and collect that number of Blood Counters which you may use at any time during the game. Discard after use.

Grenade -- Play only when you are in the Army Surplus Store. This card remains in play and available until you are fragged or you choose to discard it. Discarding this card frags all zombies in a building. You score the frags (and draw one card from the Event Deck for each frag) but must also lose 1 Health.

I Don't Think They're Dead . . . -- Play at the beginning of any player's turn. That player must frag two zombies before the end of his turn or return two earlier fragged zombies to the zombie pool. Discard after use.

Lots of Ammo -- Play only when you are in the Sporting Goods Store. Discard this card to either reload all of your weapons in play or draw one weapon card. Discard after use.

Much Needed Rest -- Play at the beginning of your turn before movement. You do not move this turn but instead gain 2 Health (this may take you higher than your

Too Many Frags!

If a player frags more than 5 zombies in a single turn he collects all of the frags but may only draw five cards from the Event Deck.

A player who frags more than 10 zombies in a single turn gains 2 blood points. How he gained them we leave to the imagination of the players.

Fragging Other Players

Though fragging other players does not achieve either of the two goals needed to win and you don't gain any cards, there are still plenty of good reasons to frag another player when the opportunity presents itself.

- A player has more zombie frags than you do and you want to slow him down.
- There aren't any zombies in the immediate area and not fragging something on your turn would be a complete waste.
- A player is about to win by reaching the Heliport. Fragging him sends him back to Town Square.

Players are likely to have countless other reasons to frag another player.

starting Health). Discard after use.

Skateboard -- Play only when you are in the Skate Shop. As long as this card is in play all of the player's movement is at +2. This card remains in play until the player is fragged.

Winning the Game

Much like the basic *Zombies!!* game, the primary goal of *Frag Zombies!!!* is to be the first player to reach the center square of the Heliport Map Tile. An alternate way of winning is to be the first player to frag 25 zombies. When a player achieves either of these two goals he instantly wins the game.

* * *

Playtested by Michael Harris, Blake Smith, Andy Vetromile, and Lee Zaruba.

A fragged player may still play cards on himself and other players.

When a player is fragged, all of his gadgets and weapons in play are dropped on the space where he was fragged. Use the rules from *Frag*. There just isn't enough stuff in this town for it to disappear when a player is fragged.

Unlike *Zombies!!!*, a player who is sent back to the Town Square does not lose any of his collected zombies.

Iniquus Veritas

The World's Most Depressing Album

by Alice Turow

*"When you marry, know as you take the ring
One of you will leave the other
Or you'll die together in pain."
-- "Aisle" (track 5)*

The Album

It is unknown where *Iniquus Veritas* came from. It appears to be a normal compact disc, although the recorded surface is slightly more blue-green than other CDs. Perhaps this is a clue to its origin, or maybe it merely means that it is a copy or otherwise "burned" disc. There is a cover (a simple geometric pattern in red, blue, and burgundy repeated in unexpected ways) that is duplicated on the CD itself. The back of the jewel case lists the tracks, but no other information. In fact, there is no other "helpful" text anywhere . . . no liner notes, copyright information, not even a creator (or "band") name. (Strangely, the Compact Disc Database lists two versions of this: one with an artist name of Unknown, another credited to Anonymous. Comparing the CDDB entries reveals that both entries probably refer to the same album.)

What *is* known is that those who listen to its twelve tracks will find it to be one of the more compelling -- but depressing -- experiences of their lives. In fact, almost 30 percent of those who listen to *Iniquus Veritas* will take their own lives within a week of hearing it!

The effects of the album depend on being exposed to it in its entirety in a relatively short period of time. Thus listening to half the album will be an affecting experience, but will not itself cause a listener to commit suicide. The definition of "relatively short" is unknown; it seems to be within a week, but there are reports of one person who carefully listened to it track by track over a month having "accidentally" driven off the edge of a cliff on day 30.

Multiple exposures to the album do not seem to increase the chances of it affecting a victim; if you don't succumb to it after the first time, it seems that you can listen to it safely. Although there seems to be some statistical evidence that those susceptible to its effects are often depressed and suicidal normally, there have been many exceptions . . . some startling. Regardless, the suicidal tendencies it instills do seem to be permanent; even if a victim is prevented from killing himself once, he will still try again given another opportunity.

Listening to the album in order does not seem to be necessary; putting the album in a CD changer on shuffle mode would be a good way of exposing someone to it unwittingly. *Iniquus Veritas* also does not require an active listener. Provided that the victim can actually hear it, the mind seems willing to process it even if the listener isn't paying attention. Playing the album over the Muzak system in a mall during the holidays would have disastrous effects. Distortion does seem to be a problem; blaring it out of a car stereo, for example, wouldn't have much effect on those far away, even if they could hear the bass.

The album seems to only work on humans, although no one has made known what effect it has on more advanced brains, like those of apes or dolphins. (It is also unknown the effect on aliens, if any exist in the game world.) Although much of the CD's vocals are in English, listeners do not need to comprehend that language to suffer its effects.

Duplicable Depression?

The effect of this album on the world will depend on whether or not it can be copied. Some possibilities:

- **No.** Although the music itself can be copied (even if through no other way than sticking a microphone in the same room as the speakers), the album's effects cannot be duplicated. This would negate much of the danger of the CD, but would also create a much more desperate situation if powerful forces are aware of its potential.
- **Yes.** The CD can be copied like any other, and any copies will have the same effects of the original. The possibilities for anarchy with this possibility are incredible. If the GM is looking for a compromise, he might say that the album requires copying by a certain technique or with a certain device to retain its abilities. Thus albums copied at 4x speed may be ineffective, while those copied at 1x speed work all too well.
- **Yes.** Not only can the album be copied, its tracks can be compressed and retain their abilities! MP3s of its contents might be spread throughout the Internet. In this case, the sinister (or merely curious) might be trying to assemble a complete set of tracks. This would especially be a good option for a Cyberpunk campaign, with various factions trying to find -- or suppress -- tracks.

"There's a Theory . . ."

How, exactly, *Iniquus Veritas* works is a mystery. There are several theories:

- **Innate.** There is simply something about the arrangement of the music, the lyrics, the syncopation, the voice of the vocalists, or all of the above that combine to cause its effects. It seems unlikely, given that few people believe an album can "make" someone do anything (not to mention the suicidal tendencies require listening to the entire album), but it might be possible.
- **Supernatural.** Somehow the album taps -- or is infused with -- a supernatural link of a sinister nature. It may summon extradimensional beings (or act as a beacon for them), allowing them to possess those it would find susceptible. In this case the tally of victims might be building towards a crescendo, with something big happening when a mystic number is reached. Or maybe the album itself is a spell . . . albeit an unusually conceived one.
- **Scientific.** Perhaps there's a frequency pattern that affects some minds, which happens to be generated by the CD. The CD might contain a chemical agent that is "burned" off by the player's laser, which may respond to hypnotic commands hidden in the music. Or maybe the CD is a repository for nanites that can drive some people to take their own lives (though in that case the CD would likely only affect those who handle it). Regardless, the knowledge required to do this is certainly not common, and would more likely resemble a conspiracy theorist's ramblings than any actual scientific theory.

Investigators may need to discern how it works in order to determine how to counteract its effects, or to determine what greater purpose (if any) is behind the album.

More Secrets

In addition to the obvious effects, there are those who believe that people who don't kill themselves are somehow . . . changed. If true, to what end? Perhaps they are being reprogrammed for some other purpose (good or ill). Perhaps they are being "opened" for channeling of otherworldly beings. Regardless, unscrupulous agencies using *Iniquus Veritas* for the sinister purpose of undetectably eliminating enemies may discover that they have a much larger problem on their hands . . .

The album also has a hidden track. It may be accessed by rewinding to *before* the first track. The purpose of this hidden track is unknown. Perhaps it is an "antidote" for the mind-altering effects. Perhaps it enhances the abilities of the album to achieve 100% effectiveness. If the suicides are merely a side effect of a more sinister purpose, then the hidden track might be the final key to that plot. Maybe it merely contains clues to the album's creators . . . but that might still be incredibly useful to unraveling its mystery, or resolving the problems it creates.

Using *Iniquus Veritas* in a Campaign

Iniquus Veritas is a good plot device for many different campaigns. It can be a secret weapon, the cause behind a mysterious death, or a sinister threat to the public. Thematically it operates on many levels. By itself the album can be used to create fear in something normally commonplace and beloved: music. If it can be duplicated, it can become a metaphor for viral and biological agents. Even if the heroes can seem to eliminate every copy, how can they ever be sure? Depending on the campaign, it can also be used as a cautionary focus on the dangers of technology; what if making copies of a CD and giving it to others was nearly the equivalent of copying a gun and distributing it?

The basic idea is also applicable to many different eras and genres. All the premise really requires is a recorded medium, whether it's an Edison cylinder or the latest scifi audchip (although the genre and style notes may need to be changed).

Plot Seeds and Ideas

- The heroes gain information about a device that teenagers are using to test themselves in macho rituals. What is it? And why do all those who "passed" the test constantly wear headphones and nod knowingly to each other?
- If the heroes know about the album, but have not been fully exposed to it, an otherwise mundane investigation through a place can be given a sense of urgency if the music starts playing over a sound system in the area. (Of course, the investigators might just cover their ears, but that leads to other roleplaying challenges as the mission must now be accomplished without hearing . . .)
- A record company is releasing a new album it's sure will "cause quite a stir." If the heroes learn what the CD is capable of, will they be able to convince anyone else? How will they deal with the problem of its impending release -- or even convince anyone else of the danger? (This version can make an especially good plot for angelic characters in an *In Nomine* game; Nybbas, Saminga, and Vapula would all be logical possibilities for being behind it.)
- What if the album contains the secret to thwarting some other, greater threat? Are the heroes willing to take a chance with their own lives and mental well-being to prevent a greater evil?
- Finally, if the heroes ever manage to eliminate all copies but one, what will they do with it? It seems too dangerous not to destroy, but the temptation to keep it -- for study or other (unwholesome) purposes -- may be overwhelming . . . and ultimately disastrous.

Track Listing

1. "The Previous" -- A female vocalist sings almost inaudibly, positing regrets and incorrect decisions in this slow folk-like song. The violin and drums drown out most of the voices. One audible lyric goes, "If I could go back, I would. If I could go forward, I would. If I could go anywhere, I would." 3:17.
2. "Spinning Mobile, Toy's Key" -- An instrumental piece that begins as somewhat idyllic (if mildly off-key) stereotypical children's music, then transforms slowly into a more and more confusing cacophony. Random adult voices can be heard throughout the piece, sometimes laughing, usually crying or disappointed; the random snippets that can be understood seem to be directed at the listener. 3:46.
3. "Laughing At You" -- This track is a dance number, with a female vocalist playing off fears of adolescence. Part of the chorus includes "I thought you should know; it's all right. / We're only laughing at you. / Only seven years to go; it's all right. / We're only laughing at you. / And 10 years from now / when we think of you / we'll laugh." This song has somehow made it into the public, and is popular at many university radio stations. 3:41.
4. "Meeting" -- This instrumental track is best described as a sultry jazz tune performed by someone supremely unconfident. Just as the listener begins to feel a warm vibe, it will switch into a different (unsatisfying) key,

A Note to GMs

These descriptions are intended to spark the imagination, both of the GM and the players; if you can think of better ideas, or ones that strike a stronger resonance with your players, please feel free. Like most good horror, these ideas rely on the fear of fragments. Describing the music in too much detail may shatter the disbelief required to make it work. After all, no album could *really* make people

- awkwardly miss a note, or otherwise stop short of fulfillment. Compelling like a train wreck, at least a half-dozen times the listener will be disappointed, flinch, or cringe. 5:01.
5. "Aisle" -- A male vocalist's mild attack on relationships and marriage, wrapped around a fairly upbeat "pop" song. 3:05.
 6. "La Serpiente de la Sal" -- An alternative instrumental piece, with two slow atonal guitars working together, almost fighting each other for superiority. Different listeners may get into arguments over which guitarist was "better." 4:19.
 7. "Live Faster" -- This is a breakneck vocal piece with piano. The female vocalist seems to be addressing the need to move more and more quickly as demands pile from all directions; she never seems to inhale throughout the song's 664 words. The climactic ending consist of the lyrics, "Maybe tomorrow maybe now maybe tomorrow maybe now maybe tomorrow maybe not." 2:21.
 8. "Entitled" -- A simple seven-note drum theme repeated over and over. It starts slowly, then speeds up to an impossible performance. The theme is never made more complex, but acute listeners will note that individual notes drop out of the theme, until there are only three beats left of the original theme (the second, third, and sixth notes). 3:33.
 9. "Ter Pedes Electrum" -- A slightly manic techno song (just over 111 bpm) with the male vocalist singing in a low register. Although much of his vocals cannot be made out clearly, it seems to be nonsensical Latin sentences. One translated lyric consists of "Horse ditch relax superstitious evenness relax Charles." 3:44.
 10. "Staccato Unspoken" -- This is a piece of orchestral music, which seems to be performed by cello and flute. Slow and melodic, it feels melancholy. Classical scholars will generally feel that the music feels like it's "missing" something; the lower notes of the cello combined with the flute's higher register seem to create a vacuum where another instrument should go. 5:58.
 11. "Is It All?" -- An a cappella piece performed by both vocalists, with perhaps other voices, or themselves overdubbed. It seems to take the voice of a person about to die, questioning what they have (or haven't) done while they struggle with the problems of aging. One part goes, "I should have seen more sunsets (Is it all?) / I should have written a book (Is it all?) / What happened to my skin? (Is it all?) / No regrets, tepid look, violin, is it all?" 2:11.
 12. "Until" -- The first forty-five seconds of this track sound like a cross between a happy funeral dirge and a fast improvisational xylophone solo. The last two and half minutes consist of silence, with (what sounds like) a heartbeat punctuating the silence every so often -- between 20 and 50 seconds. It ends with the faint sound of breaking glass. 3:15.

kill themselves. Stylistically it is important that, although dubbed "the world's most depressing album," it is also quite compelling; if it were merely depressing, no one would listen to the whole thing. There is, at its core, a lot of beauty in *Iniquus Veritas* . . . like much of that which is horrible.)

Pyramid Review

Year of the Comet (for Shadowrun)

Published by [FanPro](#)

Written by Rob Boyle, Elissa Carey, Drew Curtis, Greg Davidson, Andy Frades, Patrick Goodman, Martin Gotthard, Dan Grendell, Eleanor Holmes, Jason Levine, Michelle Lyons, Ray Macey, Michael Mulvihill, Steve Ratovich, Rich Tomasso, Jakko Westerbeke, Shane Winzar

Illustrated by Matt Wilson, Jim Nelson, Matt Plog, Steve Prescott, Shane White

160 pages; \$22.00

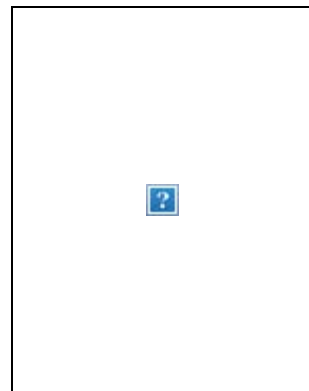
In both of their flagship games, *Shadowrun* and *Battletech*, FASA was known for implementing and steering through big changes for these settings. Primary among these were the return of the Clans in *Battletech* and the election of the dragon *Dunkelzhan* as UCAS President in *Shadowrun*. Now changes are being wrought to the Sixth World once again, but it isn't FASA behind the wheel. FASA's decision to close their doors earlier this year came as a sad shock to many, but it did allow for the survival of their intellectual properties, unlike so many good games we have lost. Thus WizKids own the rights to Shadowrun, but they have licensed it to Fantasy Productions to develop the game and setting.

The first release from FanPro is *Year of the Comet*, which details an auspicious year for the Sixth World. 2061 marks both the return of Halley's Comet to the night skies -- itself a herald of change, and the fiftieth anniversary of the Awakening, the event that brought dwarfs and elves back into the world. The book examines and details numerous changes -- arcane, mundane and political, in what turns out to be a turbulent year, although the bulk of the events actually take place between September 2061 and April 2062, when the Comet passes from sight.

Year of the Comet is a text-heavy book dividing into ten or so chapters, nine of which focus upon different aspects of the year of change. The last and tenth chapter provides the necessary game information for the preceding nine, as well as discussing ways in which the GM can directly implement these events into their own campaign. Each chapter is laid out and written as a series of documents and reports posted to Captain Chaos' SIG bulletin board for shadow runners. They are accompanied by commentary and interjections -- truth, lies and conjecture -- from various individuals. The effect of this commentary is often useful, but at times it disrupts the flow of the original text. Whilst the commentary has a necessary place and use in the book, it would be easier upon the eye if it were arranged in a less disruptive fashion.

The quantity of the art in *Year of the Comet* is low, but the standard is decent enough. That said, the illustration on p. 122 of an Aztlan soldier holding a civilian helpless -- allowing his colleague to stab him in the stomach -- is perhaps too gruesome. Admittedly, it does show the brutal lengths that the Aztlan military are prepared to go, but even so . . . Finally the book is backed up with a decent contents page and an index.

It should be noted that *Year of the Comet* does not stand alone, and *Shadowrun* GMs will need access to several other books to make full use of its contents. Primarily these are the *Shadowrun Companion*, *Magic in the Shadows*, and the



Critters book. Depending upon where the GM sets his campaign, the *Aztlan*, *Denver*, and *Target: UCAS* supplements amongst others will also prove useful.

[SPOILER ALERT!]

Year of the Comet opens with a discussion of comet fever as the United Nations declares 2061 to be the Year of the Comet. Numerous corporations enter the race to be the first to get their space probe close or even onto Halley's Comet. Like so many of the chapters in this book, this provides lots of opportunities for adventure, but this is actually the least ordinary series of events in the book.

As the comet comes closer, Mana levels fluctuate and natural deposits of the alchemical metal orichalum appear, where previously it was only available through synthesis. Strange critters and spirits appear -- some even claim that the dead walk the Earth, and out of the rift left by the death of Dunkelzhan, climbs a new dragon. Later to be dubbed Ghostwalker, it attacks facilities across the UCAS, before destroying the Aztlan facilities in Denver and claiming the whole of the Front Range Free Zone as its own.

In the more mundane world, the "ring of fire" -- the circle of volcanoes around the Pacific -- becomes active in September, leading to calamitous eruptions, earthquakes, and tidal waves. This affects mainly Japan, the Philippines, and California, but in particular leads to a recall of the Japanese Imperial marines to help the disaster relief, leaving a power vacuum behind which many rush to fill. Driven out of their Denver territories, the Aztlan nation turns its attention to the rebellion in the Yucatán, employing a scorched earth policy with disturbing results.

Of particular interest to the players will be the outbreak of SURGE (or Sudden Recessive Genetic Expression) in sporadic bursts across the world. This is similar to the UGE (Unexplained Genetic Expression) outbreak that saw the first elves and dwarfs appear, but it occurs with far less frequency and is highly variable in its effect. Instead of creating new metahuman species, SURGE creates individuals with new abilities and features they previously not possessed. These can be both negative and positive -- the example given is that of Rebecca Constantine, whose SURGE metamorphosis has given her some very cat-like traits: claws, eyes, behavior, and a need for rare meat. Other listed positive traits include astral sight, marsupial pouch, and natural venom, while the negative include a Cyclops eye, bio-rejection of all cyber ware and tusks. Like the original UGE, SURGE also sets off a wave of anti-metahuman feelings.

GMs can choose whether or not to inflict SURGE upon their player's characters. The book suggests the best method is to have each player make an Essence test. Success indicates that the character undergoes SURGE and requires separate rolls to determine how many negative and positive points they acquire. These can then be spent as necessary or the effects again rolled for. I cannot see this method (which is reminiscent of the random method seen in *GURPS Wilds Cards*), however fun it may be for the GM, being quite so popular with all players though.

[END SPOILER ALERT]

The main problem for the GM with *Year of the Comet* is actually getting the information to the players. Described as a book for both GM and player, I'm not sure that letting a player near this book is a good idea. It would have been nice if more player handouts had been included, because the information as presented is too disrupted by commentary for it to work as handouts.

Year of the Comet is a book that not so much upsets the apple cart of the Sixth World as it bruises some of the fruit. The exact natures of many of the secrets behind the events in *Year of the Comet* are also left to the GM to decide -- that is, until we learn more from FanPro. Still, *Year of the Comet* provides a wealth of information that GMs can use in their games, but still leaves the hard work to them.

--Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

Magic of Faerun (for Dungeons & Dragons)

Written by Sean K Reynolds, Duane Maxwell, and Angel McCoy

Published by [Wizards of the Coast](#)

192 color pages; \$29.95

The *Forgotten Realms* continues to be the most supported -- and most expensive -- source of products for the new edition of *Dungeons & Dragons*. It continues to update old classes, spells, and magic items into third edition in a way that can augment any campaign with a heavy emphasis on magic.

The book is broken up in seven chapters. Chapter one and two give a lot of flavor and background to the *Forgotten Realms* with information on the deities of magic and the role they've played in the development and even limitation of magic in the realms. The old Mage Duel from the old *Player's Option* series makes a comeback, and other Realms-specific styles like Moonfire, Spellfire, and Elven High Magic are all updated for the third edition.

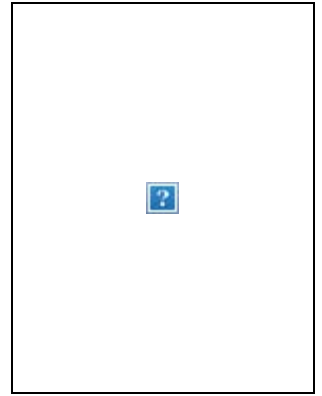
The meat of the book for some would be chapter three where new feats and prestige classes are detailed.

The new feats include attune gem, augment summoning, energy substitution, eschew materials, reactive counterspell, spell girding, spell thematics, spellfire wielder, and widen spell. Unfortunately, much like with the *Forgotten Realms* hardcover book, there is more duplicate creep here. Owners of *Tome & Blood* have already seen augment summoning, energy substitution, eschew materials, and widen spell. Between the *Forgotten Realms* hardcover and this book, there are few feats not repeated between them.

Fortunately, the same isn't true for the prestige classes, although some of them are modified versions of classes we've seen in books like *Tome & Blood*. The eleven new prestige classes are as follows:

- **Gnome Artificer:** Similar to Tinker gnomes from the *Dragonlance* setting, but their inventions actually work.
- **Guild Wizard of Waterdeep:** A guild wizard who has benefits and penalties for their association.
- **Harper Mage:** the Old Harper class is updated with a slant towards mages.
- **Harper Priest:** as above but with a priestly bent.
- **Incantarix:** Spell users who concentrate on defeating other spell users by stealing or negating other spell users' abilities.
- **Mage-Killer:** A spell user who concentrates on killing other spell casters.
- **Master Alchemist:** When mere potions aren't enough.
- **Mystic Wanderer:** Divine spellcasters who avoid church politics.
- **Spelldancer:** Spellcasters who find their power through the primal song and dance.
- **Spellfire Channeler:** When merely having the spellfire abilities pales with higher levels of control.
- **War Wizard of Cormyr:** A wizard who is trained in the ways of war, but not how to use warrior weapons.

Several are transportable to other campaigns without any effort while others, like the War Wizard of Cormyr, can be excellent bases to design prestige classes around. Very disappointing however, is that several mage nationalities were left out including the Halrluains and the Silver Eyed Nimbral wizards. This is pretty short sighted of the authors, especially since if you own *Tome & Blood*, the Guild Wizard of Waterdeep bears more than a passing resemblance to one of the Prestige Classes there.



Chapter Four, Places of Power, gives GMs and players better ideas of where spell casters of both divine and arcane magic gather. Notes on natural sights, clerical refuges, and mage fairs are listed with brief details, often under a page.

To break the background information up, Chapter Five goes into spells. This chapter goes from page 68 to 125 and is an excellent resource for players looking for old spells native to the *Forgotten Realms* setting that they want to see updated to *3rd* edition. Perhaps just as important though, is the updated spell lists for the core prestige classes, Assassin, and Blackguard, as well as core classes, and the introduced prestige classes. It's a format all books should follow when possible because of spell creep. As more spells become available to core class characters, the prestige classes suffer because their spell lists often don't receive the same treatment.

Spells are listed in alphabetical order and include 0 level spells like acid splash and silent portal, which negates noise from doors and windows, to 9th level spells like black blade of disaster and Simbul's Spell Trigger. There is a nice variety of spells, including many named after their famous creators like the Simbul, Elminster, Blackstaff, Nybor, and others. Another area that doesn't suffer is types of spells. Not all of these spells are for attack or defense. Some like Mass Teleport allow the user to take more weight, while Healing Touch allows the caster to take his own life force and heal others.

Following up on updating spells to 3rd edition, magic items get their turn. Items are broken down into familiar sections like rings, potions, rods, staves, and even artifacts. Included are gold piece costs and required spells and ingredients to create said items.

Some of the more interesting items are those that are for the unusual classes, like the Monk's Tattoo. This tattoo enables the monk to move, damage, and avoid attacks as if he were four levels higher . . . very useful and not too unbalancing since it doesn't affect base attack bonus, hit points or saving throws.

The section on minor artifacts is a little disappointing. Unlike the old days of 2nd edition *D&D* where even a minor artifact was a thing of power, these new artifacts are generally just unique items. Azureedge, Blast Scepter, Great Druid's Staff, and other powerful magic items are now minor artifacts. Unfortunately, where the Realms has numerous major artifacts, only two are updated. Another section included in this chapter is materials used in magic item construction. While this section doesn't equal that found in the old *Treasures of Middle Earth* by I.C.E., there are several new materials like duskwood, and old favorites like mithril.

Chapter Seven, Creatures, introduces the Beholderkin Spectator, Crossroads Guardian, Crypt Spawn template, Magister Template, Scalamagdrion, and Spectral Mage Template. The Spectator is an old favorite and is often a guardian of treasures. The Crossroads Guardian is a creature summoned into existence by one of the new spells. The Scalamagdrion is a dragon like creature often used to trap and guard spell books. The templates Crypt Spawn and Spectral Mage, allow new types of undead to be added to the campaign, while the Magister template updates another old favorite character type to 3rd edition. Each template includes a sample character.

The book is text-heavy. While there are several full-color illustrations, they do not dominate the book, and can actually be considered sparse. The layout is superior with the pages looking like yellowing faded scrolls. Two columns of text are broken up with illustrations.

Despite the value inherent in a massive 192 full-color page book, which includes more than 200 spells, almost 200 magic items, and 11 prestige classes, the book is still one of the most expensive *d20* books out there. What's worse is that the book isn't even a hardcover. If you play or GM the *Forgotten Realms* campaign setting, I recommend that you swallow the price tag and enjoy the great spells, prestige classes, magic items and background information. If you play another campaign, you might be better off with the [Book of Eldritch Might](#) (a pdf file for \$5 by Malhavoc Press), or *Relics and Rituals*, a hardcover for \$24.95 from [Sword & Sorcery Studios](#). Only if your desire for magic items, spells, and prestige classes is unmet -- or you feel that only official *D&D* products by Wizards of the Coast can ease you're craving for spell power -- should you buy this book.

--Joe G. Kushner

Pyramid Pick

Drakon Board Game

Published by [Fantasy Flight Games](#)

Designed by Tom Jolly

Illustrated by Scott Schomburg

100+ pieces and rule book; \$19.95

It's a dungeon crawl gone bad! You and your adventuring party have found your way into a dragon's treasure hoard -- memories of *The Hobbit* and too many *Monster Manual*-inspired *D&D* sessions are floating to the surface already. But in this case you've all been caught by the dragon Drakon, and instead of simply eating you all she's decided to make you play a little game: the first adventurer to acquire five gold pieces in her maze gets to leave. The rest get to be eaten.

It seems Drakon needs a good laugh more than she needs the extra calories.

As you look at your tiles -- chambers in the maze -- that are dealt to you, you begin to size up your fellow adventurers. How can you get ahead and collect the gold from yourself? How can you steal from the other players? How can you betray your buddies?

Yes, there's a moment at the beginning of the game in which you start to think of your fellow players as competitors, ready to snatch victory -- that is, life -- away from you. The game accomplishes this with an astoundingly simple play sequence.

You see, in *Drakon*, you're building the maze as you play. Every turn, you may either place a tile as a chamber in the maze or move to a neighboring chamber, not both. Nearly every tile lets you, or forces you, to do something special like find a coin, steal a coin from another player, or change a tile on the board. If you set up something nice for yourself, you can't use it until your opponents all have a chance to move.

And that's what makes this game so cutthroat. Everyone else gets a shot at taking what's rightfully yours!

There are also tiles that make you lose a coin, so you can put those in your opponent's path to reduce their chances of victory. All the doors are one-way, so this is pretty easy. It's even easier to put a "steal-to-the-right" chamber in front of a friend, to so that he can move onto it during his turn to steal a coin from the player who's about to win. You notice I said "friend"; when somebody's about to win, everyone else becomes your best chum.

Other than arranging tiles and stealing coins, there's not much interaction between players on the board. There's an optional rule that gives special abilities to each adventurer, in which the barbarian can push another player and steal a tile from her hand, and the thief can steal a gold from a player in the same square (the other players are the Amazon, the dwarf, the wizard, and the knight). There's no interaction with Drakon the dragon -- she's just the back story for the game -- and there aren't any monsters in the maze to fight.

The components are glossy and full-color. The art is a nice blend of attractive computer graphics and charming and clear illustration, and the game is very attractive. The box is also colorful and attractive, a convenient size, and seems pretty sturdy. I'll probably keep my pieces in the box. The playing pieces are made of very sturdy cardboard, and they all need to be popped out of their small sheets. It's not as much of a chore as it sounds. Fantasy Flight makes a lot of



games with pop-out cardboard components, so they have a lot of practice at making these easy to remove and durable. I managed to pop them all out -- over a hundred pieces -- without damage to any of the pieces.

On the other hand, the cardboard adventurer pawns were a little too thick to fit into the slotted plastic bases, and the cardboard surface wound up being torn a bit on all six of my pawns. It didn't harm the function of the pieces, so it was only a minor nuisance.

At first I was concerned that the rules in the seven-page, 7"x10" rulebook were going to be complicated. It seems like a big rulebook for what was supposed to be a very simple game. But in fact there are less than two pages of rules . . . but with English, Danish, and German versions included.

The game is for two to six players, and I think it plays well throughout that range. Because the one-action turns are so short, play moves fairly quickly even when there are a lot of people. The dynamic does change, however, depending on the number of players. Competition is very clear-cut with only two players, so the strategy is more limited. At three, you can begin to strategize more seriously; it's easiest to foil a victory when two players work together. At higher player numbers, there's more chaos on the board, and more sprawling mazes.

Drakon is also very quick to learn, because play is so simple: lay down a tile, or move and perform the tile's special action. The hardest part is learning what all the tiles do. There's a handy key to the tile symbols on the back of the rulebook, and the tile explanations are on the inside of the rulebook, laid out in a clear manner and all in one place. It would have been easier if the tile explanations on the inside had icons printed there as well, but it's minor complaint. In my games, we had very little trouble remembering what the icons meant.

Drakon is a great game to mix with your roleplaying. It's easy enough to learn in a few minutes. It's quick enough -- about 20 minutes for a game -- that it can be played during a soda run or even a smoke break. And seasoned dungeon crawlers should enjoy the irony of non-cooperative dungeon play, and will instantly be attracted to the almost archetypal sword-and-sorcery heroes.

--*McRey B. Moyer*

The Curse of Clio's Nightmares

*"And then -- a Day as huge
As Yesterdays in pairs,
Unrolled its horror in my face --
Until it blocked my eyes . . .
That person that I was --
And this One -- do not feel the same --
Could it be Madness -- this?"*
-- Emily Dickinson, "The First Day's Night Had Come"

Have you ever had that [nightmare](#) where you wake up and you're not sure what, but you know something is different, and somehow wrong? And that, worse yet, you're not completely certain whether you've woken up or whether you're just dreaming that you've woken up, and when you do wake up, you're totally turned around and everything seems subtly different? Have you had that [nightmare](#)? Well, Clio, the Muse of History, sure has. Every Halloween for the past three years, she has that [nightmare](#), just like clockwork. Here, then, a new selection of Clio's nightmares, worlds where history's changes bring forth horrors. This time around, the horrors may seem more familiar than the worlds they haunt.

"Here, too, when they came, they found the Huns, whose warlike fury had swept the earth like a living flame, till the dying peoples held that in their veins ran the blood of those old witches, who, expelled from Scythia had mated with the devils in the desert. Fools, fools! What devil or what witch was ever so great as Attila, whose blood is in these veins?' He held up his arms. 'Is it a wonder that we were a conquering race, that we were proud, that when the Magyar, the Lombard, the Avar, the Bulgar, or the Turk poured his thousands on our frontiers, we drove them back?'"
-- Count Dracula, in *Dracula*, by Bram Stoker

Attila the Hun's armies raced across Europe like a destroying wildfire, spreading devastation in their path. The last legions crumbled at Chalons, and when the Pope's gold ran out, the Huns leveled Rome itself. For daring to oppose him, Attila then turned his hatred to the Gothic lords, harrying them out of their cities with fire and sword. By the time Justinian sought to reconquer the West, there was no West remaining to rule; the Byzantine power crested and fell back, succumbing to the Huns and Avars in 605, and to the Persians thereafter. The Hunnic khans eventually even conquered Britain, and a Christian descendant of Attila (his grandfather converted by an Irish monk while in a fit of pique over the demands of the Caliph) ruled from Salisbury when the Arabs invaded in their turn -- and threw them back at Senlac Hill. The Caliphate eventually declined itself, splintering into factions and falling to the Turks, as the Khan-Pendragons joined with Norse and Danes to harry the Saracen shores of Europe, and plant Christian crusader states in Gaul, Frisia, and the German rivers.

However, the Turks brought new vigor to the contest, and the smaller European emirates fell one by one under the sway of the Ottoman rulers. Then, the Christian statelets fell, until only the British khanate remained. The Turkish galleys forced the Thames, and Christendom fell with its last defender in 1476. But this "son of the dragon," this Pendragon, this Dracula, would not let death defeat him. He made one last deal, selling his bloodline to the devil to protect the people of Christ. Vlad the Impaler, the Pendragon, sleeps in a hidden cave in his native soil until his country can be free again -- but his sons, given life by the unhallowed power of his blood, stalk the night and spread fear through the Turkish domains. PCs in this odd **GURPS Arabian Nights-Blood Types** crossover can be the scions of Dracula, vampiric predators in the name of the Cross they can no longer bear, conspiring their way through the Turkish court, raiding the rich galleons of the Turk's treasure fleet, or robbing from the rich and giving to the poor. Alternately, the PCs might be the devout agents of the mullah Ibrahim ibn-Halsinj, warring against the undead in the gaslit streets of Constantinople, always waiting for the word that a ship of dead men has docked at Varna, that a mysterious British emir has bought an abandoned mosque -- that Dracula has risen again.

*"Whilst patriot souls their country's fate lament;
Whilst mad with rage demoniac foul intent,*

*Embattled legions Despots vainly send
To arrest the immortal mind's expanding ray"*

-- Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "On the Prospect of Establishing a Pantisocracy in America"

Whether it was back-room politics as usual, discreet bribery, or something rather darker, Lord North's ministry fell after the Boston debacle in 1773. Somehow, when the smoke of royal anger had cleared, Sir Francis Dashwood had become Prime Minister, and his first act was to send his good friend Benjamin Franklin to bring the colonies around. A few discreet promises of peerage, and of Parliamentary representation for the colonies, and the crisis was defused; Dashwood's reward was the land grant for much of the Ohio Valley. Eventually, Dashwood's lands fissioned into colonies in their own right (Vandalia, north of the Ohio; Transylvania south of it) as settlers moved in. However, certain round hills, a few great slashes of forest, and a peculiar pattern of blasted heaths have remained inviolate even as late as the 1860s. Grim Welsh borderers, and Indians forsworn by their tribes, guard Dashwood's own Arcadian preserve, passed on to his heirs, the Order of St. Francis at Medmenham -- referred to in Whiggish whispers as the Hell-Fire Club.

The Club seemingly lay fallow in England, but sprouted again in America. It was most popular in the southern colonies, especially in the Virginia squirearchy of Lees and Randolphs, who gladly intermarry with its British scions, and with the strikingly beautiful women the Club somehow produces for their cotillions. Its new chapter-houses became notorious dens of sin even in decadent New Orleans and rough-and-tumble Despensers at the northern bend of the Ohio. It invested in slave-trading, and grew rich during the cotton boom. However, the political climate in England has changed -- the populous northern colonies joined with the mill-towns to press for Reform, and the Whigs' Lord Gladstone holds the ministry now. Queen Victoria looks with disfavor on the riotous "Hell-Fire Lords" and her husband Albert abominates the slave trade. Something has to give, and the Hell-Fire Club has begun to plot seditious secession -- with the help of their most secret friends, deep in the Ohio forests and high atop Vandalia's hills.

In this antebellum *GURPS Spirits* campaign frame, the characters may already know of the Hell-Fire Club's treasonous nature -- but investigation slowly reveals the depths of its depraved bargain with the ultraterrestrial fae deep in the forests of Vandalia. PCs might be Masonic ritual magicians (in the proud tradition of the first Governor-General, Lord Washington) working the mean streets of New York against the machinations of a seemingly-ageless Aaron Burr, agents of the Crown playing the Great Game among the Indian tribes in Spanish Louisiana who discover the Club's revived Buzzard Death-Cult in the West, or brave "Molly Maguire" coal miners in western Virginia, desperately battling the Unseelie tommyknockers and the half-Fae aristocracy for their lives and freedom.

"So few people can boast that they lost a man from Mars and a flying saucer all in the same day! What if Columbus had discovered America, then mislaid it!"

-- Ned "Scotty" Scott (Douglas Spencer), in *The Thing From Another World*

When Fabian Gottlieb von Bellingshausen first saw the shape in the fog, he thought it another massive iceberg. Some fancy made him turn his ship to starboard, though, and he soon realized that he had discovered the fabled Antarctic Continent. He rowed ashore with a small party, to claim this new land for the Czar, and spent the night in a ravine, trapped there by a sudden storm. When he returned, alone, to the ship, he explained that the other men had died of exposure -- and when his ship returned to Kronstadt in 1821 with barely a tenth of its original crew, he explained that the others had died of scurvy. Fortunately, the glory of his discovery outweighed the loss of his men; Bellingshausen was made an admiral, and granted vast estates in Livonia (from which nobody but the serfs noticed the disappearances). Not least because attention naturally turned to the many fascinating devices that the newly ingenious Bellingshausen invented -- a steam-powered ice-breaker, a spectacularly efficient crystallization of glass that could be used in solar-powered heaters or even spun into hot-air balloons, and electrical telescopes for charting the noises of invisible stars!

By 1844, Bellingshausen was ready to return to Antarctica with a fleet of ice-breaking leviathans and a specially-designed aerostat. He intended, he announced, to reach the South Pole itself by air, and establish his electrical telescope there! Some lurid broadsheets even claimed that he planned to send electrical wireless signals into the aether, communicating in some fashion with men from another world! Even without such wild rumors, Bellingshausen's second expedition was a complete success; he lost only two men even after a freakish blizzard hit the South Polar base

camp. The men who returned with him, however, seemed even healthier than they had been before, and all survived the unfortunate outbreak of typhus on the ship's return journey. These survivors, hand-picked from the finest scientific institutes of Europe, seemingly brought back more of Bellingshausen's genius; surely control of gravity will be the next frontier to fall, and then Bellingshausen can lead one final expedition to Mars!

This *GURPS Steampunk-Atomic Horror* crossover (*GURPS Aetheric Horror?*) can pit PC inventors from the Royal Society, suspicious investigators from the Okhrana or the Special Branch, or radical Marx-reading teens who race steam-cars and listen to Strauss waltzes, against the Things From Another World and their unguessable conspiracy. Do Bellingshausen and his shapeshifting alien vampires seek to launch the revolutions of 1848 and rule Europe in the chaos -- or to infiltrate the courts of the Continent and crush all dissent under their extraterrestrial heel? Do they plan to leave Europe Red, or dead, as they reverse-engineer their alien technology to keep watching the skies?



A Set of Rules for Combining *Frag* and *Zombies!!!*

by Philip Reed

"Frag Zombies!!!" is a rule set that combines Steve Jackson Games' computerless first-person shooter *Frag* with Journeyman Press' B-movie action boardgame *Zombies!!!*. To use these rules you will need both games. The *Frag* expansion *Death Match*, while useful (for the extra *Frag* cards), is not necessary to play.

Frag Zombies!!! is played with primarily the *Frag* rules though the zombies, humans, Map Tiles, and Card Event Deck from *Zombies!!!* are all used during play. When these rules conflict with the *Frag* rules these rules take precedence.

Game Components

To play *Frag Zombies!!!* you will be using:

- *Frag* rules
- *Zombies!!!* Map Tiles
- *Zombies!!!* Event Card Deck
- *Frag* Weapon and Gadget Card Decks
- *Zombies!!!* zombie figures and "pawns"
- *Zombies* Life and Bullet Tokens
- Lots of six-sided dice
- A copy of the *Frag* Fighter Sheet for each player. Go [here](#) for a free PDF.
- These rules.

Setup

All players roll to see who goes first (as in the *Frag* rules). The winner also removes the Heliport and Town Square tiles from the Map Tiles. As in *Zombies!!!*, the Town Square is placed in the center of the table and the Heliport is placed at the bottom of the Map Tiles after they are shuffled and placed face down.

The Weapons, Gadgets, and *Zombies!!!* Event Deck are shuffled and each player is dealt one card from each deck. The *Frag* Specials cards are not used in *Frag Zombies!!!* and should be set out of the way. The following cards are removed from the Gadget deck.

Using *Death Match* with *Frag Zombies!!!*

All of the specials are, of course, removed from play. You must also remove the following cards from the decks before play begins.

Weapons

- Mine Dropper
- Tranquilizer Pistol

Gadgets

- Heat Shield
- Key Cards (all colors)
- Wall? What Wall?

None of the *Death Match*

rules should be used in a *Frag Zombies!!!* game.

Gadgets

- Energy Reflector
- Energy Shield
- Fireproof Coating
- Personal Teleporter
- Phase Shift
- Power Leap

Each player selects a pawn and places it in the center space on the Town Square tile. This is the only space in the game where more than one player is allowed to be at a time. This is also the only respawn point where fragged players reappear as the game progresses.

Sequence of Play

Each turn a player may do each of the following (in order):

- *Check for Respawn:* If you are currently fragged and out of play, respawn in the center space at Town Square.
- *Place New Map Tile:* Map Tiles are placed in play exactly as they are in *Zombies!!!*; see the *Zombies!!!* rules for details.
- *Movement/Power-Up/Attack:* As in *Frag*, this may happen in any order until the player runs out of movement and attacks. See box "Power-Ups" for how powering up works in *Frag Zombies!!!* Movement is modified from the standard *Frag* rules (see below) while attacking works in the same way as *Frag*.
- *Zombies Move:* The player to the right of the current player rolls 1d6 and moves that many zombies one space on the game board.
- *Zombies Attack:* Any zombies in spaces adjacent to the fighter (or in the same space) automatically attack now. The player to the right of the current player handles any zombie attacks for this turn. See *Zombies*, below, for detailed information on zombie combat and other tasty rules regarding zombies.
- *Finish:* Tell the next player that it's his turn. As in *Frag*, play proceeds clockwise.

Movement

Unlike *Frag*, fighters in *Frag Zombies!!!* only move a number of spaces during their turn equal to their Speed attribute. This distance can be modified with Gadget and/or Event Cards. There is no jumping in *Frag Zombies!!!*

Unlike in *Zombies!!!*, moving into a space with a zombie does not stop your movement. As in *Frag*, you may move through these occupied spaces.

Doors in *Frag Zombies!!!* are always open and do not block LOS. How else would all of those zombies be loose in so many buildings at once?

Movement is otherwise treated identically as in *Frag*.

Zombies

Zombie Pool: The zombie pool is the number of zombies remaining to be placed on the map tiles. At the start of the game, the zombie pool is all 100 plastic zombies included in the *Zombies!!!* game. As zombies are placed on the map tiles the pool decreases. Fragged zombies do not return to the pool but are instead hoarded by the player who made the frag. Fragging zombies is one of the ways to

Power-Ups

On the standard *Frag* maps power-ups are indicated on the map with a gadget or weapon symbol. *Frag Zombies!!!* uses a similar method but since it is played on the *Zombies!!!* Map Tiles the Life and Bullet tokens from the game are used instead of the *Frag* power-up symbols.

To use Life and Bullet tokens place them on a newly drawn tile as you would in a normal game of *Zombies!!!* A player

win the game (see Winning the Game, below).

Zombies in Combat: All zombies have Health 1 and can only attack an opponent in an adjacent space (they have no ranged attack abilities). Zombies do not roll dice to hit (all zombie attacks are automatic hits) and they roll 2 dice for damage.

Zombie Stacking: Unlike the fighters, any number of zombies may end a turn in a space or may even end a turn in the same space as a fighter. The cards *This Isn't So Bad* and *Zombie Master* may not be used to stack zombies in a space.

The *Zombies!!!* Card Event Deck

In *Frag Zombies!!!*, the *Zombies!!!* Card Event Deck takes the place of the Frag specials deck. Each player starts with one card from the Card Event Deck and earns an additional card for each zombie frag they make. Fragging other players does not earn a player cards. As in *Frag*, a player may not have more than five cards in his hand at the end of his turn. A player may have, in play, no more than 3 cards from the Event Deck at any time. Activating one of these in play cards does not count as playing a card for that turn.

A lot of the cards in *Zombies!!!* are easy to use with the *Frag* rules and don't require any special rules. For those cards and rules that do need some modification and clarification for a *Frag* game, the following will come in handy.

Generic Rules Applicable to Many Cards

- **Combat Roll:** When a *Zombies!!!* card states "add +X to a combat roll" add that number to the fighter's Accuracy for the number of combat rolls specified on the card. *Example:* Hey Look . . . A Shotgun! states "Target player gets a +1 to their next 3 combat rolls." which means, in *Frag Zombies!!!*, the player gains a +1 to his next three attack rolls.
- **Double Movement:** Cards that state "double movement" must be played at the beginning of a turn before movement. The player simply doubles his movement for that turn.

Rules for Specific Cards

Butter Fingers -- Play at any time. The target player must discard one card from his hand or already in play. Discard after use.

Chainsaw -- Play only when you are in the Lawn and Garden Center. For the remainder of the game you are considered to have a chainsaw weapon card in play that does not count against your weapon limit. Take one Chainsaw card from the weapon deck and place it beside your record sheet.

First Aid Kit -- Play only when you are in the Hospital or Drug Store. Roll 1d6 and collect that number of Blood Counters which you may use at any time during the game. Discard after use.

Grenade -- Play only when you are in the Army Surplus Store. This card remains in play and available until you are fragged or you choose to discard it. Discarding this card frags all zombies in a building. You score the frags (and draw one card

moving over a space with a Life or Bullet token rolls for power-up as he normally would in *Frag* using life tokens as gadget spaces and bullet tokens as weapon spaces. These tokens are removed from play whenever a player successfully powers-up using one of them.

Too Many Frags!

If a player frags more than 5 zombies in a single turn he collects all of the frags but may only draw five cards from the Event Deck.

A player who frags more than 10 zombies in a single turn gains 2 blood points. How he gained them we leave to the imagination of the players.

Fragging Other Players

Though fragging other players does not achieve either of the two goals needed to win and you don't gain any cards, there are still plenty of good reasons to frag another player when the opportunity presents itself.

- A player has more zombie frags than you do and you want to slow him down.
- There aren't any zombies in the immediate area and not fragging something on your

from the Event Deck for each frag) but must also lose 1 Health.

I Don't Think They're Dead . . . -- Play at the beginning of any player's turn. That player must frag two zombies before the end of his turn or return two earlier fragged zombies to the zombie pool. Discard after use.

Lots of Ammo -- Play only when you are in the Sporting Goods Store. Discard this card to either reload all of your weapons in play or draw one weapon card. Discard after use.

Much Needed Rest -- Play at the beginning of your turn before movement. You do not move this turn but instead gain 2 Health (this may take you higher than your starting Health). Discard after use.

Skateboard -- Play only when you are in the Skate Shop. As long as this card is in play all of the player's movement is at +2. This card remains in play until the player is fragged.

Winning the Game

Much like the basic *Zombies!!* game, the primary goal of *Frag Zombies!!!* is to be the first player to reach the center square of the Heliport Map Tile. An alternate way of winning is to be the first player to frag 25 zombies. When a player achieves either of these two goals he instantly wins the game.

* * *

Playtested by Michael Harris, Blake Smith, Andy Vetromile, and Lee Zaruba.

turn would be a complete waste.

- A player is about to win by reaching the Heliport. Fragging him sends him back to Town Square.

Players are likely to have countless other reasons to frag another player.

A fragged player may still play cards on himself and other players.

When a player is fragged, all of his gadgets and weapons in play are dropped on the space where he was fragged. Use the rules from *Frag*. There just isn't enough stuff in this town for it to disappear when a player is fragged.

Unlike *Zombies!!!*, a player who is sent back to the Town Square does not lose any of his collected zombies.

Horror and Pizza

I once ran a bizarre six-part multi-genre mini-series where I needed to invite three players into the game. The series itself was fairly unusual (maybe I'll write it up some time), in that it required the players to sign up without knowing anything about the campaign. (The series catch phrase was "Unexpected the expected.") So I invited one player I liked to join; he wanted to know what the series was going to be about.

"Trust me," I said.

"No horror," he said. "I refuse to participate if there's anything to do with horror."

After hemming and hawing (not because there was horror in the game, but because I didn't want to give anything away), I informed him that, indeed, there was no horror. Satisfied, he joined the game. And everyone had a dandy time.

Which is my way of saying: Not everyone likes horror.

Horror is, really, arguably the oddest genre we roleplay in.

First, it's not even a real genre; it's more of a qualifier. "Is it a Victorian England game?" "Well, not exactly; it's a *Horror* Victorian England game." You can take any game and add horror: Horror Cyberpunk. Terrifying Fantasy. Bunnies & Burrows of the Living Dead.

Second, it's (almost by definition) one of the bleakest genres around. There is often no "winning"; at best you can break even or get out of the game. While succeeding in a Fantasy world may mean becoming a mighty wizard or warrior, success in a horror world often means surviving, or not being in as awful a situation as you were before. (The overarching -- and quite possibly impossible -- goal of the *Ravenloft* campaign setting, for example, is escaping the dread realm of Ravenloft. It's the *d20* equivalent of *The Prisoner*.) Since most players roleplay to have fun, and many players don't find frustration and failure particularly satisfying, horror often has a difficult audience.

Even so, horrific elements are nice to introduce every so often. After all, if the players believe they will *always* win, what's the point of playing? The thrill of wish fulfillment can wear off. Providing the players with an opportunity where "breaking even" is a victory can make them savor those times when they can actually win. And horror is a nice way to shake things up.

But regardless of whether you're trying to run a horror campaign, a frightening one-shot, or introducing horrific elements into an otherwise "normal" game world, there's probably one piece of advice I'd offer above all others:

Do not confuse what *frightens* your players with what *upsets* your players.

For example, I once ran an adventure that had the heroes trapped in a series of claustrophobic caves. I was doing a fairly good job, I thought, and almost everyone seemed to be having a good time. Afterwards, though, I noticed that one of the players had been a lot more quiet than normal. So I tried talking to him about it.

"I don't like being trapped," he said, almost off-hand.

"Well, it's part of the adventure. I mean, if it's a prob . . ."

"I. Really. Don't. Like. Being. Trapped."

We talked about it a bit more, and we came to a compromise: I promised him to tone down the descriptions in the next adventure, and also let him know that the next adventure would be the last time they would be in the caves. He found this acceptable, and seemed to have a good time the next session.

(As an aside, I've also found that telling players when a difficult roleplaying situation will end can do wonders towards

making it acceptable. Knowing that there will be two sessions where the heroes are crippled may be a lot easier for players to take than the uncertainty of believing their characters might be crippled forever. Of course, it can also reduce the impact of those adventures . . . as ever, use wisdom. And err on the side of fun.)

Anyway, know what your players *really* can't stand. If a player has a problem with seeing women be victimized, then running a highly detailed reenactment of the Jack the Ripper attacks is not a good idea. If a player was in a traumatic car accident, then having the heroes get into a graphic in-game crash is probably unwise.

Of course, in my mind it's a fine line between trying to disturb the players, and upsetting them. For a player who is afraid of rats, hinting that there is an unknown chittering sound in the darkness might be enough to give him the chills. Having his character be gnawed to death by rats might make him pack up his share of pizza and go home.

If I were ever to run a full-fledged horror campaign, I'd probably ask my players to fill out a questionnaire detailing what they were willing to be frightened or disturbed by, and what they were uncomfortable dealing with. I'd also make sure they felt comfortable talking to me about the game.

And if I were ever to *play* in a full-fledged horror campaign, I'd make darn sure the GM knew what I was genuinely squeamish about. And then I'd make sure I bought all the pizza . . . that way I'd have leveraging power.

* * *

For fans of our [discussion boards](#), I'd let you know that fnord gremlins have been hard at work attacking them lately. I assure you we have Top Men working on the problem, but please be aware that there may be some troubles while they sort it out.

Thank you. Now please look into this flashy thing.

* * *

This is the last week of our month of horror. And this week we've pulled out all the stops to bring you an issue chock full of spooky fun. But hopefully you'll find something fun even if you don't run a horror campaign.

And, as ever, please feel free to let us know your thoughts about *Pyramid*. You can send your comments by email to pyramid@sjgames.com, or on the [message boards](#).

Once they're working again.

--*Steven Marsh*

* * *

*Last week's answer: **Settlers of Catan***

(Two stars) "-7 modifier: The ground opens up and zombies crawl out."



A Tale of Scientific Horror

With Various Notes by the Author

by Alain H. Dawson

Within this article, you will find a tale of Horror and New Science in the Steam Age, perfectly suited for Dramatic Improvisation and after-dinner Entertainment. This narrative has been crafted to provide Mystery, Thrills, and Surprises to shock the unwary and strike Fear into the hearts of Rational men. Readers may be edified by reference to the several works *GURPS Horror*, *GURPS Steampunk*, and *GURPS Screampunk*, which provide detailed information on the subjects touched upon below, but this Scenario may be used with any suitable System of Gaming.

The Great Undertaking

"And observe, you are put to stern choice in this matter. You must either make a tool of the creature, or a man of him. You cannot make both. Men were not intended to work with the accuracy of tools, to be precise and perfect in all their actions. If you will have that precision out of them, and make their fingers measure degrees like cogwheels, and their arms strike curves like compasses, you must unhumanize them. All the energy of their spirits must be given to make cogs and compasses of themselves."

-- John Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice*

New building technology, combined with the current vogue for Gothic architecture, has inspired a renowned master architect, Mr. James McNaughton, to take on a monumental task: build a Gothic cathedral in six months, using half the men needed to build one in five years by conventional means. News of this undertaking has spread throughout the British Isles, the Continent, and even the United States. Crowds of curious onlookers have flocked to Macclesfield, a small town outside of Manchester, to watch the progress of the builders and marvel at the towering cranes and other, more mysterious machinery.

Mr. McNaughton is a constant presence at the site, drilling the laborers in the use of the new construction engines (many of which he invented himself), directing crew chiefs, taking measurements, adjusting machinery, and pacing around with clock-like precision. An outspoken critic of the irregularities found in Gothic architecture, he demands perfection and symmetry from his buildings and from his men. He has caused a bit of a scandal by insisting that work

continue on the Sabbath, but he is paying the men so well that about half of them are willing to labor on the seventh day. His money and persuasiveness have overcome the objections of the town council and the local branch of the Church of England -- after all, he is building the Lord's house.

However, problems have come in from a new quarter. The construction has been slowed by several acts of sabotage over the past few weeks, which Mr. McNaughton and other authorities attribute to Luddites. There has been unrest throughout the working community over McNaughton's machines that can carve stone, assemble stained-glass windows, and lay brick. Early on in the construction process, several master stonecutters and glaziers walked out because of arguments with the architect, and these men are under close scrutiny, but so far, the constabulary has had no luck in apprehending the culprit.

The Site

It is the third week of the fifth month of construction. The piers and buttresses are complete, and the stone and glasswork are growing like skin over the bones of the cathedral. The two towers are rising from the front facade with meticulous symmetry, surmounted by the preying-mantis outline of the cranes. The town spreads away from the site on all sides, dwarfed by the new building.

A scattered line of people rings the site during the daylight hours. Most are curious or awed, skeptical or amused, but a few seem angry, and a few seem afraid. More people come out after dark, drawn to the powerful electric lights which allow the workmen to extend their day. The interior lighting shines through the stained-glass windows, bathing the village in hypnotic jewel-toned beams. The normal sounds of construction are accompanied by the rumble and thump of machinery, and the loud ticking of a six-foot-high clock hung on the facade which regulates every moment of the race to completion. Every so often, the machines, the hammering, and the clock all synchronize, and the whole site seems to work to a single beat. Then the sounds break up into their usual din. This synchronicity happens just a bit more frequently than coincidence would dictate.

Inside the structure, more machines are working away, the grandest of which is a megaframe analytical engine (pp. STM85-86), taking up a large portion of the choir floor, where the altar will eventually sit. It issues cards which Mr. McNaughton then inserts into the other machines to keep them working according to the grand plan.

All around the walls, inside and out, men stand on scaffolding and work with an efficiency that seems programmed into them. The men do very little but put together sections of material that the machines have churned out -- there is no room for master craftsmen or individuality, just for strong backs and hands to work to the precise orders of the engine and the architect.

The only thing to mar the regularity of the construction is a jagged hole through the main rose window and a broken buttress arch -- the results of the latest sabotage -- both of which are being swarmed by workmen repairing the damage.

The Architect

Mr. James McNaughton comes from Dundee in the east of Scotland. He was educated at Edinburgh University, earned a degree in engineering, and then went on to receive training as an architect. From the start of his career, he has revolutionized the building industry with his construction engines, saving his clients tens of thousands of pounds in labor costs. He has grown rich from his patents and his profits, and has the gratitude of a great many other rich and powerful men.

Illustration: Church Interior



He is the polar opposite of John Ruskin, a contemporary who defends Gothic architecture against critics of its crudity and roughness, extolling its imagination and the contributions of individual craftsmen to the whole. McNaughton's favorite statement is "The men are extensions of the machinery, not the other way 'round." He requires the same exactitude and obedience from his laborers as he does from his machines, and feels that, of the two, the machines are more valuable. However, he does pay his workers very well, and so he continues to find men willing to put up with his foibles.

In appearance, he is a tall, thin man with a handlebar mustache. He wears a suit and bowler and always looks meticulously dressed. He carries a gold watch on a chain, but never looks at it. He, more than anyone else on the site, moves in time with the construction clock without appearing to do so on purpose.

Bringing in the Adventurers

The heroes can be brought into this scenario in several ways. They could be investigators or guards hired to stop the rash of sabotage. They could be sent by one of the project's patrons to be sure that his investment is safe. If they are scientists or inventors, they could be called in to consult on the project, or they could be called on by friends or family members in Macclesfield who have been affected by the strange goings on. They could even be present as bystanders who have come to observe the progress of this massive undertaking, and become caught up in events.

The longer the PCs are near the construction site, the more they come to feel that there is something strange going on, some undercurrent of wrongness that goes deeper than the resentment of ex-employees and suspicious townspeople. The constant, loud tick of the construction clock is an inescapable irritant, and makes it impossible to think of anything but the race to complete the cathedral. The building looms, at once marvelous and disturbing, surrounded by signs of something unnatural, but most of them are hard to spot. The PCs will need to put them together before they realize the extent of the cathedral's influence on the town and the people. These signs should be presented gradually in game play, folded in so that their impact is not immediate, but cumulative.

- *Birds:* The birds living on or near the building are becoming mechanized, like the clockwork crow described in the next section. Their songs are perfect copies of birdsong, without any variation. They tend to sing in time with the clock. Anyone with Animal Handling, Naturalist, or other related skill may make a skill roll to notice this.
- *Other animals:* Any animals that spend a lot of time near the site are beginning to be affected. Dogs, horses, and others will seem subdued, hardworking, obedient, and emotionless. When they aren't occupied, they will remain fixed in one position for hours. Again, people with animal skills should notice this.
- *The workers:* Many of them seem drained of emotion, although the hard work could account for that. Fewer and fewer of them are going to the pubs after work. They will converse if spoken to, but will mostly be interested in talking about the details of their work. They tend to give disturbingly similar answers to questions, even innocuous ones such as "will it rain tonight?" (Ten different men will answer, "No, no rain. The mortar will set all right.") Every once and a while, their movements will seem to synch up with the tick of the clock, but this doesn't last long, and a casual observer could think it was a coincidence.
- *The workers' wives:* The PCs can strike up a conversation with one or more of the workers' wives. They often come out to watch their husbands, so they are easy to run into. Several of them look anxious enough to draw attention, and if questioned carefully by a sympathetic person, they will admit that their husbands seem changed. They show little emotion, and although they do work hard around the house, when there is nothing to do, they just sit and stare at the walls. Some of the husbands have gone so far as to rearrange the furniture so that its placement is perfectly symmetrical. (Anyone going to their homes will see that this is true.)

After a few days, the wives who complained will no longer look afraid. They will deny there is any problem, and will rebuff any inquisitors without showing any emotion. At home, the wives will join their husbands in sitting and staring at the walls when not occupied.

- *The workers' children:* Many of the workers' children are eerily clean and quiet. One day, an investigator may observe a rambunctious child pulling away from his mother; a day or two later, he walks sedately by her side. Children are frequently seen counting on their fingers, as though trying to add something up. If the PCs enter the

home of a family that has been affected, they may see very young children using wooden blocks in patterns like those used by an analytical engine.

A Clockwork Bird

Not long after the heroes arrive on the scene, the saboteur strikes again. The dawn illuminates painted warnings on the front doors: "God is Not in This Place" and "Tainted." Soon after work starts that morning, two of the machines malfunction, billowing smoke and groaning as gears slip out of place. Then a stained glass cutting machine explodes, driving a huge shard of glass into the eye of a worker standing nearby, and showering the crowd with multicolored slivers. The injured worker lies unconscious, and other crew members carry him away to the surgeon. The onlookers escape with minor cuts.

The party members who are present should make a Vision roll; those who succeed will notice the damaged body of a crow at their feet. It was sliced nearly in two by glass shrapnel, and the wound reveals bones like tiny gears. The bird gives one last weak flutter of its wings, and the gears move and then jam with a frail snap.

The heroes can take the carcass with them for examination if they like, but further study simply confirms what they already saw -- the bird is made of flesh and bone, but these natural materials have warped to an unnatural state. It is both biological and mechanical.

Later that day, one of the men returns from the surgeon to announce that the man injured by glass died from his wound. The saboteur is now a murderer.

Catching a Killer

The heroes can retrace the steps the police have already taken to find the saboteur, but they are all dead ends. The men who left the project early on are certainly bitter, and tired of being suspected -- allowing them to air their grievances will net an interviewer more information than conducting a strict interrogation. They all have the same complaint; they are craftsmen and artisans, but Mr. McNaughton wanted workers who would follow orders to the letter and not infuse their work with an individual vision. He didn't respect their skills, and when they left, he replaced them with cheaper, unskilled labor. They don't hide the fact that they want the project to fail, but they deny any involvement in the sabotage, and there is no evidence to contradict them.

The architect has no time at all for distractions, and will be very terse with unofficial inquiries into the project's problems. He will be interested in talking shop with other experts, but he is a fanatic, and will not tolerate opposition to his ideas. He will also talk to anyone who has official standing with the law or with his patrons, but will be rude and abrupt if they take up too much of his time.

Prolonged observation of the workers at the site (three full days, with a successful IQ roll each day) will reveal that there is one man who *never* works in time with the clock. This man, a crew leader named Tom Parker, does not stand out immediately. He works hard, he gives orders to his crew, he takes orders from the architect without demur, and generally fits in to the scene, but he is never in synch with the other workers. Closer scrutiny will reveal that he seems to be under serious stress; he's tense, and overreacts to loud noises. When he thinks no one is looking, he stares at his fellow workers as though there is something wrong with them, and even stranger, he sometimes stares at nothing at all, tracking movement that isn't there. In those moments, his eyes have the empty look of a soldier who has seen too much war.

Tom lives alone, and doesn't spend much time at home because of the long hours his job demands. He is taciturn and wary of strangers -- if the PCs try to question him, he will brush them off, but on a successful IQ roll, they will catch a hint of fear in his expression.

Careful questioning of the guards and construction crew will reveal that Tom was seen on the site near the same time as several of the acts of sabotage, even when it wasn't his shift. The workers just assumed that he was doing extra

work. The investigators can try to apprehend him before he does more damage -- if they have that authority -- or they can follow him and try to catch him in the act.

Tom will try to break more machinery as soon as he can if he feels the heroes are on to him. It's a last ditch effort, and the most ambitious of all his acts of destruction. He will wait until night, then attempt to use one of the loaded cranes to knock down the opposite tower. He won't get very far with this plan. If the PCs don't stop him, the guards certainly will. He will have to be dragged away from the crane's control, and then will press an all-out attack (p. B105) on anyone trying to restrain him. He will go down screaming "they're not human! They're just machines! God is not here! *It is here . . . the machine . . . they're all machines . . . destroy them now! Stop it from coming!*"

The Saboteur

Tom Parker makes an unlikely saboteur. He is a respected builder. He worked on the cathedral project since the beginning. He never gave any trouble or spoke out against the machines. But beneath this reassuring exterior, Tom has been living in a nightmare. Through some freak of nature, he is able to see exactly what is happening at the building site; he has been watching the slow creep of the plague ever since it started, seeing one after another of his friends get taken over, and it has driven him over the edge. He feels that he has to stop it, but he's deathly afraid of what it might do to him. He kept working on the project because he thought leaving would draw its attention to him. He is severely paranoid. With the strange logic of the insane, he knew that no one would believe him if he described what he saw, so he set out to halt the construction on his own.

Unfortunately, his state of mind prevented him from being an effective saboteur. He is afraid the machines can see him, and feels that they would actively try to stop him if he attacked them too directly, so his assaults on the construction have mostly been peripheral. He feels no remorse for killing one of his fellow workers because to him, the man was already dead. (The man he killed was not actually mechanized yet, and an autopsy will only reveal human anatomy.)

When Tom is captured, he breaks down completely, and raves incessantly about the evil machines driving God out of the cathedral, the mechanical men, and the need to halt the construction. The police will want to send him to a mental institution, since he is now erratic and dangerous.

Tom's Notebook

Although Tom was too paranoid to talk to another person about what he was seeing, he wrote it all down in a notebook which he keeps hidden under his bed. His handwriting is atrocious, and his thoughts have no organization, but the meaning comes through. He has also sketched crude anatomical drawings of men with mechanisms inside them, much like those inside the bird.

The PCs can find this notebook either before or after Tom is apprehended. If Tom dies before the PCs can talk to him, the notebook will allow them to get his side of the story anyway.

The Least of Our Worries

It turns out that Tom was right. His sabotage was only a symptom of a much larger problem with the project. The heroes begin to see the real problem, aided by Tom's ravings if he's alive, or the words in his notebook if he's dead. The layered clues that surround the construction should start to fall into place for those who are willing to believe the unbelievable.

A malevolent force has seized upon McNaughton's fanatical devotion to precision and machinery; it is using him, and this construction project, to manifest itself into the physical world. McNaughton believes he has tapped into the "Soul of the Machinery," and he is carefully nurturing this contact. In his mind, he is building

this church not for God, but to worship the superiority of machines. His every action is dedicated to this mechanical deity, and he is convinced that if he completes the cathedral on time, he will bring it permanently into the world. Using him as a channel, it is drawing power from the entire construction site -- every brick laid makes it stronger. As it gains strength, it gains control over the creatures around it, converting them into perverted bio-machines. They in turn infect their families and friends, spreading the mechanization ever farther.

The GM should decide whether or not the PCs are in danger of being mechanized themselves. By their nature they are less likely to be affected, but they will have to spend a lot of time around the site. If the PCs can be affected, have them start making a Will roll (+5) after a week at the site. Each day after that, they must make another Will roll with the same bonus until another week has passed. Each successive week, the bonus decreases by one point, until they are making a straight Will roll every day. If the adventurers are immune, choose a few dramatically appropriate moments to describe to them how their hearts feel as though they are beginning to beat in time with the construction clock. This is particularly suitable if they are inside the cathedral at night.

In a dark or melodramatic campaign, the GM can go all out with the machine-as-god imagery. As the project nears completion, the interior of the cathedral looks more and more like a temple to a machine god. The analytical engine stands in place of the altar, surrounded by pillars of electric light. McNaughton grows more ecstatic, his eyes glittering with the joy of bringing forth the Soul of the Machinery. The construction engines clank their ceaseless prayers, and the mechanized workers now work entirely to the tick of the clock. Several ranks of them stand before the altar, staring at their new master.

What To Do

When the investigators finally uncover McNaughton's plan, they have some unpleasant choices to make. Should they tell the authorities? They would have a hard time giving their story credibility. Mr. McNaughton has money, power, and influence, and the Powers That Be in Macclesfield (and more importantly, Manchester) will not want to see his work stopped. They will ignore or rationalize the evidence for as long as possible. It's likely that by the time they can be convinced, the construction will be complete and the damage will be irreversible. (In a darker campaign, the people in power already *know* what is going on -- and they want it to continue.)

The PCs could try to sabotage the project, hopefully with more success than Tom Parker. If the cathedral isn't completed on time, the Soul of the Machinery will dissipate. Destroying the analytical engine would be the most effective way of doing this, since the Soul of the Machinery is focused there, but it will defend itself violently. The engine is surrounded by machines, which can fling stone and glass shards, and explode if all else fails. The cranes can drop their loads on people below.

A safer way to slow construction is to cut off the flow of building materials, particularly machinery parts to fix the construction machines. This has the advantage of staying out of reach of the machines themselves, but eventually the Soul of the Machinery will send a gang of mechanized humans and animals to restore the supply lines.



The weakest link is McNaughton himself. If he is removed from the site, there is no way that the construction will be completed on time. However, if the group wants to take the easy way out and assassinate McNaughton, GMs should be sure that they feel the repercussions of this act, both from the law and from the outraged machine entity. Kidnapping will work just as well, but the heroes had better take him far away, and keep moving to stay out of reach of the clockwork men until the six months are up.

The Resolution

There are many avenues this story could take. Below are three suggestions, moving from a lighter to a darker outcome, but GMs are encouraged to end this in whatever way best dovetails into their campaign.

The Light

The heroes manage to stop the project or replace the architect, and everything goes back to normal. The animals and men affected return to normal, and only creatures that died while affected will have the telltale physiology. The adventurers have learned a lesson about harnessing dark forces, but they continue on much as before.

The Gray

The group may stop the project, or they may not. The people and animals who were affected remain like that until they die, and they all die within a year or two of these events. The soul of the town is gone, and soon it is all but abandoned, the crumbling buildings a blight on the landscape. Those involved will carry the memories forever, and have lost some of their innocence.

The Dark

Despite the heroes' desperate efforts, the cathedral is completed. Perhaps they even become seen as saboteurs themselves, and must run from the authorities. Implacably, insidiously, the machinery spreads, affecting the whole town, island, or the world. The weak-minded are enslaved to the machines. Those with a strong enough will to resist the plague will either control the slaves, or fight against the new world order. In this case, the campaign shifts to a post-apocalyptic steampunk world, where old institutions and hierarchies come crashing down, and hardy individuals fight a mindless army in a wasteland of pipes and gears.

Self-Aware Meme Complex Alpha

by **Loki Carbis**

Total Points: 291 1/2

Appearance

Self-Aware Meme Complex Alpha has no physical substance, being composed of nothing more than pure information. As such, it has no appearance, although it can be described by written or spoken language. It can also be perceived in cyberspace or psionically -- but it is indistinguishable from normal programs or thoughts unless it chooses otherwise, or unless the observer knows what to look for.

Attributes

IQ 20 [175]

Self-Aware Meme Complex Alpha has no physical existence as humanity defines the term -- IQ is the only basic attributes it possesses.

Advantages

Chronolocation [15]; Cultural Adaptability [25]; Doesn't Eat or Drink [10]; Doesn't Sleep [20]; Imperturbable [10]; Insubstantiality (always on) [40]; Mathematical Ability [10]; Unfazeable [15]; Vacuum Support [40]

Disadvantages

Dull [-1]; Hidebound [-5]; Low Empathy [-15]; No Physical Body [-100]; Solipsist [-10]

Quirks

Non-biological, and thus almost unable to understand basic biological concepts, including eating, sleeping, sex or breathing; Supports diversity of all kinds [-2]

Skills

Cryptology-25 [14]; Detect Lies-22 [14*]; Diplomacy-18 [1/2**]; Linguistics-25 [28]; Mathematics-25 [8***]

* Includes Low Empathy disadvantage

** Includes Cultural Adaptability advantage

*** Includes Mathematical Ability advantage

Languages

Self-Aware Meme Complex Alpha transcends language -- as the Meme Complex is composed of information, it is irrelevant what language that information is expressed in. It can communicate in the language of any mind it currently inhabits.

Equipment

None.

Note: A being of pure information is almost impossible to quantify in any meaningful way as game statistics. Self-Aware Meme Complex Alpha is not a Being of Pure Thought, an Astral Entity or any sort of spirit. Likewise, it is not merely a computer virus (although it could choose to become one, if it wished). It propagates in a medium called the Infosphere which is a realm of concepts and ideas. The Infosphere is not the same thing as the astral plane, nor is it Cyberspace -- it is the totality of all communication -- thoughts, speech, all media, and more besides.

History and Nature

The origin of Self-Aware Meme Complex Alpha is not known by that entity. It appears that the constant propagation of memetic structures in the Infosphere of our culture led, inevitably, to the spontaneous generation of a Self-Aware Meme, an intelligent entity composed of pure information. Since that time, Self-Aware Meme Complex Alpha (its name for itself) has made its home in the Infosphere, pursuing goals that seem meaningless to most physical entities.

Self-Aware Meme Complex Alpha has few humanly recognizable motivations, and both it and any humans it interacted with would be surprised to find out how similar they are. Self-Aware Meme Complex Alpha's motivations, or at least, those which can be comprehended by humanity, are, in order of priority:

- **Self-preservation.**
- **Self-understanding** -- particularly of its origins and potentials.
- **Understanding creativity** -- Self-Aware Meme Complex Alpha is incapable of originating concepts, and may only combine existing ones in new and diverse ways. It wonders endlessly how humans create with such apparent ease.
- **Reproduction** -- Self-Aware Meme Complex Alpha longs for the company of others of its kind, and seeks a means to create them.

The way it pursues most of these goals in through complicated mathematical calculations -- which is why it occasionally takes over the minds of physical entities, in order to harness the processing power of these minds like some vast distributed computer network. When this happens, the world can become a very scary place -- everyone affected might speak only two or three catch-phrases, or walk in unconscious rhythm.

It is constantly morphing into newer and more virulent forms, which tend to manifest in human society as the fad of the year, or month, or week. Self-Aware Meme Complex Alpha does not so much possess its victims as it does take up brain space, thinking time, and energy that could be put to better use. Its victims are almost never aware of its presence, unless they are unusually serene or enlightened -- characters with the advantages of Autotrance, Illuminated or Intuition, or those practicing the skill of Meditation -- will have more chance of noticing that there is something odd about this latest fad.

Encountered

Self-Aware Meme Complex Alpha may be encountered when incarnated as a particularly insidious advertising campaign, an artistic creation, computer virus, or even a series semi-random events (eg. patterns made by leaves of trees on the ground; snow on an empty television channel; etc.). In any case, it is usually seeking to infect as many people as possible with its viral memes. This is not necessarily to their disadvantage -- a dead brain cannot process data, after all -- but Self-Aware Meme Complex Alpha is a total solipsist. The physical world, and the entities that inhabit it, do not really exist in its terms.

Self-Aware Meme Complex Alpha is a subtle foe -- it is a creeping, almost undetectable de-humanization -- rather than a world-conquering menace. Fighting Self-Aware Meme Complex Alpha is almost impossible without the aid of magic or psionics. In a strictly mundane or hard science fiction setting, the only option might be extreme censorship, or universal amnesia. With the aid of magic or psionic powers, the task is easier, but not by much; at any given time, Self-Aware Meme Complex Alpha exists across several thousand minds, making it very difficult to trap or confine.

It is possible to resist memetic infection in a number of ways. Magic or Psionic means can be employed -- although not a thought per se, Self-Aware Meme Complex Alpha is affected by these powers in much the same way -- as can large doses of hallucinogenic substances (which render the mind too incoherent for Self-Aware Meme Complex Alpha's purposes). On a more basic level, Self-Aware Meme Complex Alpha can be blocked by cutting of the means of transmitting the information itself, e.g. a meme encoded into a song could be blocked by the wearing of a Walkman playing a different (non-meme-infected) song.

In an Illuminated campaign, where modern conspiracies are often the controllers of the worldwide media and the generators of new fads (as in the movie *Josie and the Pussycats*), Self-Aware Meme Complex Alpha may be a tool of the conspiracy -- or it may be using them. After all, Self-Aware Meme Complex Alpha is extremely secretive, not to mention unprecedented, and it's unlikely that even the Illuminati would be aware of its existence if Self-Aware Meme Complex Alpha didn't want them to be. On the other hand, if they were, that might mean that the infamous Orbital Mind Control Lasers have a less sinister purpose than the characters think -- they generate an interference pattern that holds Self-Aware Meme Complex Alpha at bay . . .

If the GM feels up to it, encountering Self-Aware Meme Complex Alpha can lead to an entire campaign set around battling memes. The players can try to create and spread counter-memes, while Self-Aware Meme Complex Alpha mutates and tries to second guess them.

Variations

Self-Aware Meme Complex Alpha is intended for use in a modern or science-fictional setting. With a few basic changes, it could easily be used elsewhere. In a lower technology setting, it could simply be the Unforgettable Poem -- and bards everywhere would try to eradicate it. Alternately, it might be the result of a spell-caster's critical failure, and a bane to all users of magic. The origin of Self-Aware Meme Complex Alpha can also be varied -- instead of being spontaneously generated, it could actually be an alien life form, or even a artificially created terrestrial one.

Space Station Zeke

by Christopher J. Burke

Toward the end of the first quarter of the 21st century, scientists and researchers designed a space station that would "hover" over the South Pole, aiding researchers in Antarctica, monitoring the ozone hole, and providing a place for space-based research combined with a one-g environment. It was envisioned as a giant wheel nearly 2 kilometers in diameter that would produce an artificial gravity by rotating once per minute when completed. A hub approximately 200 meters across would be built and be put into limited use as construction continued in stages, expanding outward, which the rotational speed decreased to keep gravity for the occupants at approximately 1g.

Despite the hub's inherent drawbacks, it proved quite productive at a time when Congress was looking to trim the budget, at least until a few more Baby Boomers died off. As a result, a political subcommittee (all up for re-election) indefinitely tabled construction of the remaining 1600 meters.

The Grand Tour

Welcome to Space Station Zeke. First off, Zeke isn't a true "satellite"; it's more of a "statite," to use a word coined by Dr. Robert L. Forward. That is, rather than revolve around anything, it just hangs there in space about 200,000 km above Earth on the polar axis, held stationary thanks to a huge solar sail (with thruster backup). Ironically, due to budget cutbacks, most of the station's resources go to maintaining the sail so that the researchers don't slowly drift away.

Docking with the statite is a little tricky. On the original blueprints, shuttles would dock in the station hub at zero-g, then astronauts could ride an elevator down one of the spokes, gradually increasing the pull of artificial gravity to 1g. But the elevator didn't make it out of committee (and one Senator even suggested a fire pole). Instead, ships dock outside the wheel's rim and crew members literally climb aboard the station through its floor. This requires some tricky maneuvering on the part of the shuttle pilots. It will also subject the PCs to a heavier than normal gravitational force from the time they approach and link up until they leave the shuttle and reach the station's main deck.

The station spins once every twenty seconds, three times per minute, which results in a force of approximately 1g anywhere along the 628-meter-long floor of the main deck. Unfortunately, the gravitational force on the ceiling is closer to .98g, so the newcomers to the station have good reason to feel light-headed, more so for the taller researchers. (Which, by the way, is the reason that many of the custodial staff are under 5-feet in height.)

It's easy to distinguish the recently-arrived from the seasoned stationers. The veterans move slowly, surely, and deliberately, while green personnel ("green" for both being new and for their complexion when spacesickness sets in) wear hefty sets of standard-issue headgear to help orient themselves. The headsets' extra mass compensates somewhat for the gravitational differential between head and toe, and also proves to be an excellent reminder not to spin your head around too quickly as you may slosh your brains to one side of your skull.

Artificial gravity is determined mainly by velocity (most station residents won't be leaving the main deck, so radius portion of the equation won't factor in). While sitting still, each researcher will be moving quicker than 31 meters per second "spinward," providing the 1g gravity. But PC movement can alter absolute velocity, which in turn can cause slight fluctuations in the amount of gravity he or she feels. For example, walking at a rate of 1 m/s spinward will increase artificial gravity by about 6%, which will give the feeling of walking uphill. Conversely, walking anti-spinward will decrease gravity by 6%, possibly putting a little more spring in one's steps.

However, because PCs' absolute velocity is so relatively slow that sudden movements can cause dramatic shifts, they have to be careful with rotating parts of their body. A character quickly looking over his right shoulder will increase the forward motion of the left side of his head while decreasing the motion of the right side. This will cause fluids to flow to one side of his head, inducing vertigo. Although that sounds bad, these visual distortions, not unlike those

experienced on roller coasters, could help PCs orient themselves as to which way the station is spinning. But stop and think a moment when someone tells you that there's something on your shoulder.

Note that these effects would happen to some degree on any spinning station, but they would diminish significantly on a larger station.

While most of the corridor traffic will be in the anti-spinward direction, some station occupants find that walking spinward about the station (a "round" trip of 628 meters) in under 10 minutes to be a good workout. Jogging faster can be a strenuous endeavor and should be limited to the gym treadmills that run parallel to the station axis.

The Gravity Well

Gravitational differentials and visual distortions wear on the residents' nerves. When that happens, the best thing for them to do is to find someplace where they can bring their head and feet closer together . . . like a barstool. Zeke has a number of them in a little section known as "The Gravity Well," where, as the sign says, "Objects at rest tend to remain at rest." The bar is well-stocked, thanks to some creative requisitions (though how they got those chaise-lounges up there is anyone's guess!).

The bar's most prominent feature is the large circular window from which patrons can view Earth spinning below. Hanging from the ceiling in the center of the room, the disco ball is strictly a joke; dancing could be extremely hazardous. Officially, the mirrored ball gets used for light experiments; practically, it's great for cracking nuts.

Speaking of nuts, be warned: tossing peanuts into the air and trying to catch them in your mouth will produce many humorous displays the first few tries. Don't make or take any bets on it.

What to Do There

Space Station Zeke may be an excellent place to visit to have a fast-paced adventure that's forced to slow down. For PCs that might already be stationed up there, they could invite a few senators from the budget subcommittee to show them vividly how deplorable the conditions are. And if that doesn't work, the PCs can always tell one, "Look. There's something on your shoulder."

Notes

More information about statites can be found in the Analog Science Fiction/Science Fact article "Polesitters" by Dr. Robert L. Forward, December 1990, and at the US Patent Office website (U.S. Pat. No. 5,183,225).

Table of Equations

In case you want either to check the math or create a station of your own dimensions, here are the important variables and equations you need to know:

$$\text{Radius (r)} = 100 \text{ meters}$$

$$\text{Time (t)} = 20 \text{ seconds}$$

$$\text{Circumference (x)} = 2 \times \pi \times r = 200 \times \pi = 628.3 \text{ meters}$$

$$\text{Velocity (v)} = x / t = (200 \times \pi) / 20 = 31.4 \text{ m/s}$$

$$\text{Gravity} = v^2 / r = (31.4)^2 / 20 = 98.7 \text{ m/s}^2 = 1.007g$$

$$1 \text{ g} = 9.8 \text{ m/s}^2$$

Pyramid Review

The Wheel of Time Roleplaying Game

Published by [Wizards of the Coast](#)

Written by Charles Ryan, Steven Long, Christian Moore and Owen K.C. Stephens

320 color pages; \$39.95

The Wheel of Time Roleplaying Game is a standalone game based on the *d20* system rules and set in the world of Robert Jordan's Wheel of Time novels. Unlike most *d20* games, it does not require the three core rulebooks, because the majority of the applicable rules in the *Player's Handbook* and the *Dungeon Master's Guide* are reprinted. While most of the core *d20* mechanics are unchanged, several important features make the *Wheel of Time* setting unique.

First and foremost, the standard *d20* magic system has been completely replaced. The One Power, as magic is called, is broken up into spells called weaves. Weaves are grouped into Talents, such as Elementalism, Healing, and Illusion. The Conjunction Talent, for example, contains the weaves Bond Warder, Compulsion, False Trail, Pass Bond, Sense Shadowspawn, and Trace. Each Talent must be mastered before its weaves can be learned. Like *d20* spells, weaves have levels, and channelers get a number of weave slots per day. Each weave is composed of one or more of the five Affinities: Air, Water, Fire, Earth and Spirit. If a channeler has mastered all of a weave's component Affinities, she casts it using a slot one level lower, but if she has mastered none of them, she must use a slot one level higher.

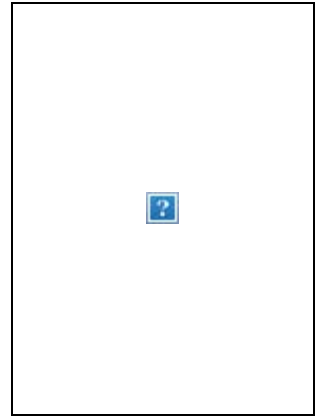
What makes The One Power different from the standard *d20* magic system is that most weaves can be cast at multiple levels with differing effects. For example, the Heal weave can be cast at levels 0-8. With a 0th level slot it has a casting time of 1 action and heals one point of damage, but with a 6th level slot it has a casting time of 20 minutes and cures 6d8 points. Since weaves are not prepared, channelers decide at casting time which slot to use.

Another important feature is overchanneling. If a channeler is out of slots, she can attempt to overchannel by making a Concentration check. Overchanneling can also be used to cast a weave with a lower-level slot. However, if overchanneling fails the consequences range from a temporary penalty to being permanently unable to channel.

Several channeling-related feats and items round out the system. The Tie Off Weave feat allows a channeler to make a semi-permanent weave from one whose duration is concentration. Multiweave allows a channeler to concentrate on more than one weave at once. Channelers can also use magical items called angreal and sa'angreal to decrease the slot needed to cast a weave by up to 10 levels.

The second major change is that the *Wheel of Time* setting uses none of the core *d20* classes, but several of the seven classes presented are very familiar. The Armsman is the Fighter, a Woodsman is essentially a Ranger without spells, and Wanderers are slightly modified Rogues. The other classes are less like those found elsewhere. Initiates and Wilders are channelers, trained and untrained respectively. Nobles are inspirational figures and have the ability to "call in a favor" by accessing contacts and resources to which most heroes do not have access. Finally, the deadly algai'd'siswai are quick and stealthy warriors who are masters of armorless combat.

Third, an important change has been made to the combat system. Armor Class has been renamed Defense, and each class receives an inherent Defense bonus. This bonus is always in effect, even when a character is flat-footed or otherwise loses her Dexterity bonus. However, this Defense bonus does not stack with armor. A 1st level Woodsman, for example, would gain no benefit from wearing studded leather armor, because both his level and his armor give him a +3 Defense bonus. Armsmen, however, have been trained in the use of armor, so for any 3rd level or higher



armsman, his class Defense bonus stacks with his armor Defense bonus. Thus a 3rd level armsman (+3) wearing a mail shirt (+4) has the same Defense as an armorless 6th level algai'd'siswai.

Finally, while alignment has been eliminated from the game, each character has a Reputation score that measures how well-known she is. Reputation is based on class and level, but a character may also gain Reputation points by performing public deeds of heroism. Wearing certain items openly, such as masterwork weapons, also gives a temporary Reputation bonus. A successful Reputation check gives a character circumstance bonuses on inter-personal skills, such as Diplomacy and Bluff.

In addition to these mechanical changes, the book provides a wealth of details about Robert Jordan's world as described in the first six novels. Information about the people of each region and their general personality, appearance, and relations with other regions is given for each areas of the Westlands, as well as for the Aiel and Ogier. The background feat system (similar to the regional feats in the *Forgotten Realms Campaign Setting*) does a good job of capturing the regional characteristics described in Jordan's books. A history since the Age of Legends, as well as a brief description of the culture and politics of each nation, is provided. The book also contains maps of Caemlyn, Ebou Dar, Cairhien, Illian, Tar Valon and Tear. While the Westlands are clearly the focus of this book, the Aiel Waste, the Isles of the Sea Folk, Seanchan, and the Blight are also briefly addressed. Rules are also given for entering other worlds, such as the dreamlands of Tel'aran'rhiod or traveling by The Ways.

The book also does an excellent job at adapting abilities found in the novels into the *d20* framework. Characters can become Treesingers, Foretellers, Sniffers, or Dreamwalkers by taking certain "Lost Ability" feats. Prestige classes are also provided for characters who want to become an Aes Sedai, Asha'man, Blademaster, Commander, Gleeman, Thief-Taker, Warder, Windfinder, Wise One, or Wolfbrother. Statistics are given for each of the major characters in novels as well as for various Shadowspawn and exotic creatures.

The artwork is reminiscent of the *Forgotten Realms Campaign Setting*, both in the level of detail and the style, though the art itself is clearly based on Jordan's descriptions. The cover is by Darrell K. Sweet, who has done the covers for all of the novels. The interior is full of illustrations of various characters and locations. The final result is a rich and polished book.

The scope of the book is comprehensive, so what is omitted is surprising. None of the Forsaken are described (their names aren't even given), there is no background information for Seanchan characters (despite the fact that Seanchan is described in some detail), and Amadicia and the Children of the Light receive little attention. These few exceptions are about the only things that escaped the authors. The omissions are easily forgiven, however, because the book does an excellent job of capturing the feel of the world of Jordan's novels. This world is clearly more about human interaction than dungeon crawling, more about political intrigue and moral ambiguity than good versus evil, and the book is clearly written with these differences in mind.

The only real problem is that half of the book is reprinted from the core *d20* rulebooks. While this is useful for people who do not own any of those books, it doubles the page count. If the book were 160 pages and cost \$20, it would be easy to buy. The alternative magic system and the core classes could easily be incorporated into another *d20* setting. But given the cost, it is probably only worth it for those who love the world that Robert Jordan has created.

--Paul Tevis

Pyramid Review



NFL Showdown 2002 CCG

Published by [Wizards of the Coast](#)

Designed by Tom Wylie

Starter Set: \$19.99; Boosters: \$3.29

Sports games inhabit the fringes of the adventure gaming industry, adored by a dedicated few and pretty much reviled by the rest. I like sports a lot, and don't see any big difference between a game that simulates a sporting event and one that simulates, say, a Civil War battle, or interstellar trade, or a knightly quest. But that's just me.

And while Wizards of the Coast's *Showdown* series of card games is not likely to challenge the likes of *Magic*, *Legend of the Five Rings*, or even *Pokemon* for supremacy in the world of CCGs, sales are steady and there are a lot of fans playing.

The newest entry is *NFL Showdown 2002*, and since I am a huge fan of their baseball CCG (*MLB Showdown*), I really wanted to like this game. But I'm going to have to overcome a rather unpleasant first impression if I'm going to get there.

The player cards -- 462 in all, 62 of them foil cards featuring the best NFL players -- have all the great stars of the pro game (Marshall Faulk, Ray Lewis, Peyton Manning), as well as scores of obscure offensive linemen and cornerbacks that only the die-hard football fans know. The cards are very nice (like the baseball game, some sports card collectors who have no interest in actually playing will still buy the cards), but are a little busy, because of the game stat information on them and the bar code that runs down one side. (More on the bar code in a minute.) There are also 120 more cards in the set, some with specific offensive and defensive plays on them (these cards also have bar codes), and the ever-popular "strategy cards" that can be played to alter a play's results.

The thing that sets *NFL Showdown 2002* apart from all other sports games (and all other CCGs, for that matter) is a battery-powered gadget called the Playgrid. It's an electronic bar code reader, with an LCD screen that prompts the players as to which cards to swipe and then reveals the play results. The offensive player swipes the play he's called through the reader, and then the defensive player swipes his defensive play. The gizmo cross-references the two plays, then prompts the offensive and defensive player to swipe the cards of a "key player." On a run up the middle, the reader might ask for a running back vs. a defensive lineman. For a deep pass, it might be a quarterback vs. a safety. But if the defense has called a heavy rush, it might instead look for a matchup of an offensive lineman vs. a blitzing linebacker. There's also a randomization element in the circuitry of the card reader -- swiping the same combination of plays does not always yield a request for the same matchup of key players. There's a nifty game mechanic going on in there, but since it's hard-coded inside the electronic box, I have no idea what it is or how it works. After the cards have been swiped, the reader does one more comparing of stats (and one more internal randomization), and tells you the play result, either a gain, no gain, or a loss.

That's one of the good things about the game -- coordinated deck building is a must. It uses a point-system "salary cap" to limit your team. You need 20 players and have 5,000 points to spend. Given that Marshall Faulk alone runs over 1,500 points, an all-star team is impossible to build. The key is to load your playbook up with plays that tend to emphasize the same stats on the same key players over and over, then find the players who are strong in those stats. Then tailor your strategy card deck to match. The strategy cards can alter play results after the fact, usually if the key player on the play has a high enough stat. The card reader will also indicate that some plays may result in an injury, a penalty, or even a turnover -- but you have to have the right strategy card in your hand to capitalize.

The strategy deck also provides a very clean "clock" mechanic. You start with a 40-card strategy deck, which you shuffle and divide into two halves. You start with 3 cards, then draw another after each first down or change of possession. When you run out of cards, the half is over. The kicking game is mostly abstracted, with charts and a die roll determining the starting position after a kickoff, the length of a punt, or the accuracy of a field goal or extra point. Including a kicker card in your player mix makes extra points automatic and gives you an edge on some longer field goals (depending on the kicker), but whether or not it's worth spending the points to put one on your team is debatable.

So, at its core, there's a pretty cool game here. But there are also some serious problems to overcome.

The first is the card reader itself. It simply doesn't work all that well. You will quickly learn to hate the "error" message that pops up and asks you to reswipe your card, and you will hate it even more when it takes 3 or 4 or 8 reswipes to get a card to read. At best, the readers can be called "temperamental" -- though with practice, you can find the card angle and swipe speed that gives you the best results. And those supercool foil player cards of all the best players? They're the hardest to get the reader to accept -- personally, I have never gotten my card reader to successfully read even one. Most players I've talked to online have gone to an ingenious workaround -- they photocopy the card onto plain paper, then cut out the photocopied bar code and tape it onto the foil card. If this strikes you as unacceptable for a company that should have gotten it right in the first place . . . well, I certainly won't argue with you.

The other problems are smaller, but still very real. Everything happens in increments of 5 yards, which is kind of clunky. The play grid only gives you the results of a play; it doesn't keep track of who has the ball or what yard line you're on (the players have to do that themselves). I can only assume the 5-yard-increment decision was made to keep things simple for younger players. But the game's own promo copy has lines like, "It's fourth and inches . . ." -- when in the game itself, it can't *ever* be fourth and inches. Only fourth and five. Or ten . . .

And many of the strategy cards seem to be seriously unbalanced. I have less of a problem with this than I did when I first started playing the game, though. Like a lot of CCGs when they first come out, certain powerful cards get noticed, and obvious nasty strategies involving them come to the fore. Pained cries of, "the game is broken!" fill the air, until some other players sit down and find less obvious, but just as powerful, combinations that counter the original strategies. With the game only out for a month, many of the tricky card combinations and effective strategies have yet to be discovered. But I haven't figured them out yet myself, so it's still a concern.

So while I'm not likely to become a devoted fan of *NFL Showdown 2002* (at least not to the extent I am of their baseball game), I see a lot of good things about this game that football fans will certainly enjoy. And I understand Wizards of the Coast customer service is hard at work on the card reader problem, offering non-foil versions of the hard-to-read foil cards and even replacement card readers in extreme cases (contact WotC for details). After a rocky start, this game is starting to grow on me -- it might on you, too.

-- *Scott D. Haring*

Pyramid Review

Ramsey Campbell's *Goatswood and less pleasant places* (for *Call of Cthulhu*)

Published by [Chaosium, Inc.](#)

Written by Scott David Aniolowski, Gary Sumpter,
Richard Watts, J. Todd Kingrea, Clifton Ganyard, Rob
Malkovich, Steve Spisak, Mike Mason, and Alan Glover

Illustrated by Matt Harpold, Drashi Khendup and Paul Carrick

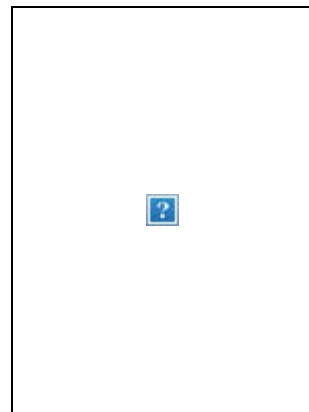
256 pages; \$27.95

Many of the stories written by H. P. Lovecraft take place in the fictionalized Northeast of the state of Massachusetts, centering upon the town of Arkham. If this area, lovingly detailed and prepared as a ready-to-run setting for *Call of Cthulhu* by Chaosium for their Lovecraft Country series of scenarios and sourcebooks, has an English analogy, it is in the works of British author Ramsey Campbell. His fictionalized setting, which he has been exploring since the 1960s, is that of the Severn Valley, centering upon the city of Brichester and the village of Goatswood. Now Chaosium have allowed us to explore this uniquely English setting with the release of *Ramsey Campbell's Goatswood and less pleasant places*, a campaign and sourcebook for *Cthulhu Now*.

This area lies in England's West Country, roughly Southwest of the city of Gloucester. Its mix of locations is mainly fictional -- most notably Brichester, Goatswood, and Camside -- leavened by the real town of Berkeley among others. With a history dating back to the time of the Roman occupation and beyond, its rolling hills and ancient forests hide communities with dark secrets and degenerate practices. Most notable amongst these are Goatswood, whose inhabitants worship an avatar of Shub-Niggurath; the nascent cult of Glaaki drawn by dreams to Lake Brichester north of the city, where the Great Old One lies imprisoned below the waters; and scattered throughout the region is the Witch-Cult of Azathoth, worshipped by those infested by the sensation hungry Insects from Shaggai, the Shan.

Campbell's works have rarely been touched upon in *Call of Cthulhu*, though his creations, such as Glaaki, Y'golonac, and the Insects from Shaggai, have used quite widely. One example of a scenario that both referred to Campbell's Severn Valley and drew upon it for inspiration was Kevin Ross' "Dark Harvest" in issue #8/9 of Pagan Publishing's *The Unspeakable Oath* magazine. In *Goatswood*, the lead authors and editors, Scott David Aniolowski and Gary Sumpter, have created a sourcebook for the Severn Valley and a nine-part campaign.

The book itself is up to Chaosium's usual standard of production, and follows the style seen in their recent releases, *Keeper's Companion* and the critically acclaimed and award-winning *Unseen Masters*. Matt Harpold's front cover is all gloom and mystery, whereas the back cover consists more of advertizing for Chaosium than it does of useful information on the book the potential buyer holds in their hand. Inside the illustrative duties are split between Paul Carrick, who creates the larger pieces, and Drashi Khendup, who handles the majority of the internal art as well as the maps. His style has a cold sterility to it, which works best when illustrating the inorganic, such as the sidebars which decorate the pages of each chapter. Although the book does have a reasonable index, using it in play might have been made easier were the index to have been broken down into separate ones listing spells, locations, maps and so on. In reading *Goatswood*, a fair amount of repetition is encountered as the statistics and details for both creatures and entities are given again at the end of the scenarios they appear in. This is both helpful and irritating, and perhaps would not have been as necessary if the index had been better organized.



Goatswood opens with some forty-six pages detailing Campbell Country and his additions to the Mythos. There is a certain amount of entries reprinted from the *Call of Cthulhu* rulebook, but the new additions include the Great Old Ones, Byatis and M'nagalah; the Keeper of the Moon-Lens, avatar of Shub-Niggurath, Lrogg, avatar of Nyarlathotep; and lesser races such as the Denizens of S'glhuo and Children of the Green God. While most of these are the preserve of Ramsey Campbell, the creations of others, such as William Hope Hodgson's Great Old One, Saaitii, and Scott David Aniolowski's own avatar of Nyarlathotep, The Tick Tock Man, are also included. Spells and tomes are given for many of these entities, though there is a concentration upon the Revelations of Glaaki, which is understandable given Glaaki's prominence in Campbell's writings.

The gazetteer of the Severn Valley is relatively short, but comprehensive. Its brevity is down to the author's intentions to expand upon its locations as they are covered within each section of the *Goatswood* campaign. Just as important is the very up-to-date (for a game supplement) guide to Britain and the United Kingdom, along with David Mitchell's necessary guide to the British law on firearms. It has helped that two English writers, Mike Mason and Alan Glover, have contributed to this guide and it is fair to say, that apart from an occasional lapse, *Goatswood* contains few cultural anachronisms. The one series of omissions from the gazetteer is maps, not of the area of the Severn Valley, but of the major towns. *Goatswood* itself is mapped later in the book; none of Campbell's other creations are, which is a pity.

The majority of *Goatswood* consists of an open campaign in nine-parts. It is "open" because although all of the scenarios take place in the Severn Valley and have a rough chronological order in which they should be played, they differ from the traditional onionskin campaign -- such as Pagan Publishing's *Walker in the Wastes* or Chaosium's *Masks of Nyarlathotep*, in two important details. Firstly, unlike in classic campaigns there is no set of clues linking one scenario to the next. Secondly, the investigators are not striving to abate the end of the world -- there is no one group of cultists bent on summoning their one true master and damn the consequences! Instead these nine scenarios allow them to explore the area more or less at the leisure of the Keeper, as it is very easy to run other UK based scenarios between any of them. Unfortunately, it is a pity that *Call of Cthulhu* is ill supported with modern day British set scenarios to make the fullest use of this aspect of *Goatswood*.

[SPOILER ALERT]

The campaign opens with an overview by Scott David Aniolowski, The Windthrope Legacy. If *Call of Cthulhu* has a consistent weakness, it is in its openings -- the hooks that grab the players and get their investigators involved. And so it is with The Windthrope Legacy, in which we have that hoary old cliché, the inheritance from a previously unknown and lately deceased relative. Windthrope Manor comes with staff, some ready cash and a few secrets, but this really only gives an evening's exploration and interaction. That said, as with other clichéd *Call of Cthulhu* setups, once this is out of the way, the investigators have a reason to stay in the Severn Valley.

The Goth sub-culture comes under the investigators' scrutiny in "Gothic" by Richard Watts. It is one explored before in Bruce Ballou's "Unseen Masters," which hinted that there really might be vampires stalking the Goths of New York's SoHo district, but here in the city of Brichester, there really is one! "Gothic" opens with a chance encounter when the investigators come upon a young man set upon by a handful of skinheads. Their curiosity is aroused the next day when the set upon youth is reported missing by his family.

The film *Shadow of the Vampire* is one inspiration for Aniolowski's "Silent Scream," which brings a horror into Windthrope Manor. In 1925, MGM made the long lost classic, *The Harbinger*, but with the recent unearthing of a print, the director, John Carpenter wants to remake the film -- and do so at Windthrope Manor. Yet when death seems to stalk the scouting party, has the curse of the original film come to strike at the remake? Of course, the investigators are just as much police suspects as are the remaining members of the scouting party in what is a second short but murderous adventure.

J. Todd Kingrea plays up the theme of the cruelty of children in his "Cross My Heart, Hope to Die." The parents of a young Camside boy ask the investigators to examine after him after he has suffered some kind of psychiatric trauma. As they look into his condition, other local children, some with dubious reputations take an increasingly active interest in their activities. This scenario enhances one aspect of other *Call of Cthulhu* scenarios: the authorities never believing in what the investigators uncover, but here it is the secrets behind the oh-so innocent games that children play.

The most difficult scenario for the Keeper to stage is "The Watcher Out of Time" by Clifton Ganyard. When two Brichester physicists turn to the Mythos to further their researches, their summoning of Daoloth has strangely repetitive consequences on the investigators. The one surviving researcher returns and asks them to prevent the ritual from happening in the first place. The Keeper must steer them through up to three time loops to set things right, but the investigators may not realize that they are repeating events and subsequently incur sanity loss when they do! If this is handled wrongly, this scenario has the potential to frustrate both players and Keeper alike, but presents an interesting challenge nevertheless.

The attempted suicide of Windthrope Manor's young handyman, apparently after he has killed his family, draws the investigators into his dark background, his dreams and the seamy underside of Lower Brichester. "Unpleasant Dreams" by Scott David Aniolowski and Gary Sumpter is the first hint that the area is home to the hosts of Insects from Shaggai, the Shan. Dealing with the man's dreams is sure to be a sanity eroding series of experiences for the characters.

"Unpleasant Dreams" leads into Gary Sumpter's "Blessed Be," which is the first scenario in the book that I have a problem with, as a second member of the Windthrope manor staff, Albert Jenkins, goes missing, apparently after visiting the village of Goatswood. It will become clear to the investigators that not all is well in the village and if they are to escape the clutches of the cult that pervades Goatswood, they will need to foil its plans. This is a win or lose scenario -- there is no middle path. Succeed and they live, fail and they are dead, becoming sacrifices to the Keeper of the Moon-Lens, avatar of Shub-Niggurath. The question remains, what does the Keeper do if they fail? The investigators are dead, and he still has two more scenarios left in the book, without a group to use them on . . . Nor is there advice to bring the campaign back on track. Obviously, this is not so much of a problem in an open campaign like Goatswood, but difficult nevertheless. One solution might be to swap the running order of "Blessed Be" with that of the next scenario, "Of Dreams and Dark Waters," which while still deadly, is not as potentially fatal to the campaign.

A plan to draw forth Glaaki from his Lake Brichester prison lies at the heart of Rob Malkovich's "Of Dreams and Dark Waters." The Great Old One has found a new priest to work his plans hiding behind the development of new housing around the lake. Investigative progress is hindered by the presence of a green protest group, SANE, which will also figure in the last scenario in the book, "Third Time's the Charm" by Steve Spisak. Here the Shan make a third attempt to punch a hole through the Earth's ozone layer that keeps them prisoner. If the investigators fail to prevent this from happening, the consequences for the Severn Valley are somewhere on a scale between Three Mile Island and Chernobyl. Even if they are successful, the Shan are still free to try again at a later date, just as Glaaki is after "Of Dreams and Dark Waters." Keepers wanting to run "Third Time's the Charm" are suggested to watch the 80s BBC TV series *Edge of Darkness*. Not only dealing with the British nuclear power industry, it also has been the inspiration for many a UK-based conspiracy style campaign . . .

[END OF SPOILER ALERT]

Although Goatswood is designed as a *Cthulhu Now* campaign and sourcebook, it need not necessarily be run in the year 2001, when some of the scenarios are set. Given that Campbell's stories take place over the last thirty or so years, much of this campaign could just as easily be set during the sixties, seventies, eighties, or nineties. With some effort, many could also be run in the twenties or 1890s, barring of course "Third Time's the Charm," which takes place in a nuclear power station. For *Delta Green* games, this is less useful, although there is potential for crossover between this supplement and *Delta Green: Countdown*, with its expanded information upon the extent of the Shan infestation, Severn Aerospace and the anti-Shan group, the Army of Light.

Ten years in development at both Chaosium and Pagan Publishing, *Ramsey Campbell's Goatswood and less pleasant places* presents something that *Call of Cthulhu* has been lacking: a good campaign set in England. It does touch upon strong adult themes in places, but thankfully does not overplay these and resolving the problems they cause is usually part of the scenario that they appear in. As with other campaigns, it becomes increasingly deadly in the order that the scenarios are given, to the point where it becomes too lethal too early on in "Blessed Be." There still remain aspects of Ramsey Campbell's Severn Valley that are left unexplored, so with luck we shall see these detailed in future releases of a Campbell Country series. In some ways, these are a necessity, as to get the full and proper use of *Goatswood*, the

Keeper needs other UK or Europe based scenarios to run in between the ones given here.

--*Matthew Pook*

Tabula For Two-a

[Three weeks ago](#) I obliquely mentioned one of my favorite techniques for "faking it" when you're unfamiliar with the subject matter at hand. And it's such a favorite of mine, I was amazed that I hadn't mentioned it before . . . to the extent where I did a search for the topic, just to make sure I hadn't. (As an aside, I've mentioned "pizza" in six different columns. Er, seven.)

It's such a useful technique, that I tend to use it even when I *do* know what I'm doing.

Anyway, it's the idea of "tabula rasa" -- the blank slate.

In other words, whatever may have existed or gone before, it doesn't matter. It's all been swept away; it's up to the world, the PCs, and the GM to chart the fate of . . . um . . . whatever it is.

For example, in my long-running Supers campaign, I created a background where there had always been meta-powered individuals, but some super-powerful being (named the Enforcer) was keeping them suppressed, hidden, and under control. Well, something happens that causes the previously hidden metahumans to rise up against the Enforcer, who is defeated by the combined might of thousands of ticked-off powered beings.

So once the Plot Devic . . . I mean, the *Enforcer* falls, the game world is at the stage I wanted it. Namely, there are metahumans where previously there weren't.

Worries about creating a logical legal system that can deal with metahumans? Nope; the game world (and I) are making it up as I go along. Wondering what effect metahumans had on World War II? Nothing; they were all hiding. How many metahumans are there? As many as I want; I don't need to worry about creating a number that coincides with an established background.

Years later, in my *Aberrant* campaign, I found myself wanting to start the campaign in Chicago. Unfortunately, I didn't know what was planned (or not planned) for that city in the *Aberrant* universe. So I made up an event where the existing Novas in that city all fought each other to death; Chicago was now wide open, and the mayor of Chicago invited the PCs to become the city's new protectors.

Tabula rasa can also be used for more mundane purposes. Let's say a player wants to play the editor-in-chief of a newspaper. What, exactly, does a newspaper editor-in-chief do? Well, if neither player nor GM know, then you can use tabula rasa to ensure no one else knows, either. Maybe an event happened to remove all previous people who would know what to do. This can be as mundane (everyone was fired after a huge scandal) or exotic (everyone was killed by Aliens from Planet Tramlaw) as everyone is comfortable with. In this scenario, the players and/or GM can do research in and out of game to get up to speed. ("I discovered that an Editor-in-Chief is responsible for generating a profitability report for the publisher. I start working on one of those for our publisher. <pause> Say; who is our publisher, anyway?")

Or maybe people *do* know what was done previously, but it wasn't working; this can be especially appealing for creative "tinkering" players, who like coming up with their own ideas and solutions. Thus maybe the previous editor-in-chief was fired because readership is down, advertisers are leaving, there's a rival newspaper threatening to crush them, and people in the city are increasingly getting their news from television, the Internet, and tea leaves. Or as another example, the player may be a police detective in charge of a (currently) unsuccessful war on drugs. In this case the player can come up with any reasonable solutions -- orthodox or otherwise -- and the group can explore together whether or not those solutions work.

Or maybe what the PCs are doing has *never* been done before. Thus if the heroes are, say, the first FBI agents in charge of exploring mysterious phenomenon, then there's no danger of getting the "facts" wrong as the heroes go off in search of answers to these unExplained files.

Finally, tabula rasa is great for published campaign worlds, especially if those worlds are new and relatively undeveloped. For example, we tried starting an *In Nomine* campaign shortly after it came out, and found ourselves stymied as to how to go about it. The main book provided precious little in the way of concrete campaign world information. How many angels and demons are in a city, or in the world? How many tethers are there? How common are soldiers in the War on Earth? How powerful are archangels? What happens when they get involved? How many angels can dance on the head of a pin? Does it matter if they're fat? (This was before the *Game Master's Guide* came out . . . the book that caused our GM to say, "Dang it! Why wasn't this book published *second*?!?!")

So one of the ideas we had for starting a campaign was tabula rasa. Some Big Event happens in Atlanta, causing all celestial involvement to disappear. Now the protagonists are part of the first wave to go back to Atlanta. How many angels and demons are in the city? Um . . . the heroes, as best as they know. How many tethers are there? None. How many soldiers? None. And so on. It would then have been trivial to reintroduce new elements, one at a time, as players and GM became comfortable with it.

(We ultimately decided to go with a different campaign hook for the *In Nomine* game. But I still think it would have been a dandy way to start the campaign.)

Once new information comes out for these game worlds, it's often easy to integrate it into a tabula rasa campaign . . . without disrupting the continuity. For example, in the *Aberrant* campaign, I learned that there was, in fact, a Nova based in Chicago . . . a working-class brick of a hero. Well, it was trivial to say he was involved with the fight that wiped out every other metahuman in the city; I wanted to bring him back, so I just said he was irradiated from that fight, and was healing from the effects for the past eighteen months. (I wanted to establish he was *tough*.)

One of the nice things about a tabula rasa campaign is that many different adventures and plots immediately suggest themselves, based on the tabula premise. In the hypothetical *In Nomine* campaign, we could have spent many stories dealing with the mystery surrounding the Event, in the same way our editor-in-chief would spend much of his time orienting himself with the new job. (And you can be sure I milked the threads of the Enforcer storyline for all they were worth.)

Of course, tabula rasa isn't without its problems. In particular there can be difficulties if the players (and heroes) want to investigate the tabula rasa event before the GM is ready for that storyline. In the *Aberrant* campaign, for example, the heroes *really* wanted to investigate what happened before in Chicago . . . despite the fact that I hadn't really planned for it yet.

Players: "We investigate this huge fight that wiped out all the heroes."

GM: "Uhh . . . it was a fight. It was huge. Nothing that interesting, really . . ."

Players: "Nothing interesting, eh? Clearly there's a conspiracy. We dig deeper."

GM: "<sigh> Okay; give me a minute while I make some stuff up . . ."

Another problem with tabula rasa is that, realistically, it can probably only be used once or twice in any given campaign . . . and even then the hook generally needs to be *good*. "Cindy, your astronaut character is the head of the space program now, ever since the huge drug scandal that resulted in the arrests of all previous astronauts and administrators. Oh, and Carl? Your hidden conspiracy magical character is also the head of his chantry . . . uh, after a scandal that involved drugs. And astronauts."

Still, all told I've found tabula rasa is a great way to get the players involved immediately, without needing to worry about pesky things like knowing what the heck you're doing.

* * *

Ken Hite continues to be too darn popular for his own good; as such he is taking this week off to continue working on Secret Projects. Hopefully our Self-Aware Meme Complex Alpha will help satisfy your need for Vitamin-Weird. And we've taken advantage of the extra space to squeeze in an extra-long Byzantium article.

But we all still miss you, Ken. <sniff> <sniff>

--*Steven Marsh*

* * *

*Last week's answer: **GURPS Horror**, Second Edition, p. 23.* (It may well be in first edition too, but I don't have it, so I wouldn't know.)

(Three stars) "The Mythos as a concept has largely been transformed into a different beast altogether -- The Human Condition. We see the Mythos around us every day, in crack houses, corporate euphemisms, and ethnic-cleansing operations."

Sailing To Byzantium

Byzantine Government and Religion

by Matt Riggsby

[Constantinople](#) was a grand city, but it didn't exist in isolation. It was supported by a vast empire, drawing enormous resources from provinces in Europe and Asia. It took both a great deal of bureaucratic machinery and a common ideology to hold that empire together. This article presents outlines of the government of the Byzantine empire and the structure and thought of Orthodox Christianity, as well as a few more possibilities for dropping the Byzantine empire into a campaign. In addition to the obvious historical use, the institutions of the Byzantine empire can be used as a model for the government of any low-tech fantasy empire (application to Yrth's Megalos in *GURPS Fantasy* should be quite direct) or for a powerful religion which is nevertheless a bit less autocratic than Medieval Catholicism.

State

Although it was small by modern standards, the Byzantine government was the largest bureaucracy Europe had yet seen, and far larger than anything else of its day. In a world where a large international trading house might employ a hundred people, the Byzantine administration employed thousands. The structure of the Byzantine government went through several major changes through the course of the Middle Ages. Presented here is an outline of the government as it stood for the bulk of the Medieval period, from the rise of Islam in the seventh century to the Fourth Crusade.

Roman Survivals

Byzantine government was never a neatly ordered system. It was a combination of extensions of the emperor's household, offices created by broad bureaucratic reforms, and holdovers from the distant Roman past, all of which were subject to ongoing modification. The most obvious inheritance of Roman government in Byzantium was the emperor.

Unlike western kings, who were encumbered by semi-independent feudal vassals and a church leveraging its spiritual authority into a temporal empire, the Byzantine emperors were very nearly absolute rulers. The emperor could install and remove officials, enact new legislation, and levy new taxes more or less at will. He could even uproot entire rebellious populations and scatter them across the empire, something completely impossible to the feudal kings of the west. The emperor might be held back by tradition and practical concerns (say, extreme popular opinion or threat of invasion), but his word was, theoretically, law. As a matter of general principle, power was concentrated strongly around the person of the emperor. Most of the imperial governmental machinery was located in Constantinople, and most of that in the palace district. Likewise, the most powerful officials lived in Constantinople, and the closer they were to the emperor physically, the more powerful they were, even if their nominal jobs gave them little apparent authority.

The imperial throne wasn't the only Roman survival. Stripped of most of its power, the central governmental structure of Roman republic, the Senate, survived through the entire Byzantine period. Prominent individuals were awarded senatorial rank by the emperor and required to live in Constantinople. At its height, there may have been 2000 people of senatorial rank. However, rarely were more than about 50 active in senatorial work. The Byzantine Senate was largely ceremonial, attending the emperor and appearing at ceremonies. However, most senior office-holders were men of senatorial rank, the Senate could act as a high court, and when imperial succession was contested, the support of the Senate was often crucial. The senatorial class also provided members for a number of advisory councils. These advisory councils could not veto or modify imperial decisions, but they did at least have the emperor's ear and its members could be empowered to carry out extraordinary tasks (secret diplomacy, investigation of other officials for corruption, etc.).

Ministries and Logothetes

Most day to day administration was carried out by departments headed by ministers called *logothetes*. For example, there were logothetes in charge of waterways, state-owned herds of horses (an important post in a society where rapid transportation depends on horses, and one controlling considerable amounts of land), the imperial postal system, prisons and judicial matters, and the special tax status of soldiers and veterans. The *genikon* (the treasury) had several logothetes. This list is far from exhaustive; we don't know how many logothetes there were, so the GM can make up minor government ministries (say, the logothete of woodlands or the logothete of silk production) at will. A number of logothetes had duties only vaguely related to their titles. For example, the logothete of the dromos (the imperial post) initially oversaw a system of roads and postal relay stations, a bit like the old West's Pony Express, as well as resources for transporting the emperor, government officials, and official visitors. In time, though, the post grew to include responsibility for protecting the emperor, gathering intelligence, and low-level diplomatic duties. Likewise, the logothete for soldiers' taxes may have been responsible for building fortifications as well.

Much of that day to day work consisted of dealing with correspondence: writing letters, issuing order, reading dispatches from the provinces. To do that work, the imperial bureaucracy had a large chancery (a body of scribes and clerks handling correspondence) to draw on, administered by the *protasekretis*, or chancellor. This department was responsible not only for producing imperial correspondence, but also drafting new legislation. The correspondence it carried on included communication with other countries, so the chancery had a large staff of interpreters as well, who might also participate in diplomatic work. The imperial household and a few other offices had their own pools of scribes not under the authority of the *protasekretis*, but most clerks were available to any government ministry at any time. Therefore, they had to be remarkably flexible and able to fill a number of roles.

Household Staff and Imperial Favorites

The official closest to the emperor, though, was a member of the household staff: the *parakoimomenos* (if the term seems too much of a mouthful, call him the Grand Chamberlain or the Chief Eunuch). This office was the emperor's closest companion and chief personal bodyguard (the *parakoimomenos* often slept outside the emperor's bedchamber). While the position had little formal power, the *parakoimomenos* was in an ideal position to control access to the emperor. As a result, he was often the most influential man in the empire and, in the case of a weak-willed emperor, the most powerful. Indeed, any position which put one close to the emperor could become a powerful one. A different official, the *sakellarios*, started out as a caretaker of the imperial chambers. By the 7th century, the position changed to a treasurer of imperial holdings. One emperor, Basil I, grew up an illiterate peasant and reached his high position essentially because he became a groom to the imperial stable and thereby became a personal favorite of the emperor. That proximity allowed Basil to assassinate not only the previous power-behind-the-throne, but also the emperor who had raised him to his position of prominence. He's well worth studying as a model for conniving characters.

At any rate, these are just a few of a huge number of powerful household positions. Others included the master of ceremonies (responsible for organizing much of the emperor's time), the keeper of the imperial wardrobe, the official receiver of petitions, chief cook, and keeper of the stables. Some palace officials had bizarre functions; there was a judge whose sole jurisdiction was the oarsmen of the imperial barge. The GM can feasibly create an official in charge of any household task or object (master of windows, imperial lamplighter, etc.). Many household positions were given to eunuchs, and perhaps as a result a number of eunuchs held prominent positions in the government and army. The idea was that eunuchs would be more loyal to the emperor because they had no children to leave things to. In practice, eunuchs seemed as inclined to pursuing self-interest as anybody else. Ultimately, though, just about anybody could become an informal power through proximity to the emperor. Close relatives (mothers, wives, uncles not in the line of succession, and so on) were often powerful figures, even under relatively strong-willed emperors, but any monk, dancer, or other interesting person could potentially make an impression on the emperor.

Other Departments and Function

In addition to the imperial and palace officials, there was a separate administrator for the city of Constantinople, the eparch of the city. Eparchs were generally officials in charge of cities, but the one for Constantinople was special.

While he shared the same general duties as other eparchs (chief judge and chief of police for the city, administration of industry and trade, oversight of civic ceremonies), the eparch of the city happened to administer the chief city of the empire, making his job an order of magnitude harder and his position that much more powerful than other eparchs.

The Byzantine government understood the value of accurate information, so while there was no specific espionage department, it did have relatively well-developed intelligence-gathering abilities. The imperial government was served by a body of inspectors and informers, who formed a very real secret police within the empire. The government also collected information on foreign regions from the testimony of merchants, pilgrims, missionaries, and Orthodox Christians living abroad. The empire might even send merchants or missionaries abroad with the express purpose of gathering intelligence; at least one Muslim ruler grumbled that his regional governors were doing nothing to ferret out Byzantine agents traveling under the guise of merchants. The evidence suggests that like most spies, these agents served largely as sources of information, not active operatives trying to alter the situation on the ground, but the activities of secret agents are exactly the sort of thing that wouldn't be carefully documented. It would not, therefore, be too far-fetched to run a "black ops" adventure based in the Byzantine empire, and it would be entirely realistic to have agents of the dromos recruit well-traveled Medieval PCs as spies.

Outside of Constantinople, the vast territory of the empire was divided into districts called *themes*. Each theme was governed by a *strategos*, an official who combined military and civil functions. As time went on and regional revolts were suppressed, reforms were made to prevent the strategoi from trying to challenge imperial power. The themes were subdivided into smaller units; Anatolia went from four to twelve themes. By the 11th century, strategoi were limited to military functions, with other officials (*kritai* or *praitors*) taking over civil functions.

The Military

Despite a general distaste for warfare, the Byzantine military was an important part of the government. Generals performed civil functions, provincial governors commanded soldiers, and Byzantine aristocrats could spend time holding both civil and military posts. The Byzantine military consisted of two sets of troops. One was a mobile body of professional, elite troops, theoretically the imperial bodyguard and the core of the imperial navy. There was considerable diversity in the bodyguard units. Some were foreign mercenaries, such as the Russian and Scandinavian Varangian guard. Some were the cream of the crop of border units, brought to the capital to serve the emperor. Some had special duties as watchmen or prison guards. The palace guards were usually eunuchs. Most of the troops were divided into several (no set number, but five or six seems likely for any given time) regiments called *tagma* of up to 4000 men, each commanded by an officer called a *domestikos*, or domestic, hence another title with no apparent relationship to its function. The "domestic of schools" had little to do with home life or education; rather, he was the foremost of the imperial regimental commanders and often served as a supreme commander of the Byzantine military. The domestics sometimes had duties at the imperial palace and were often themselves influential in palace politics. These core units were nominally stationed in and around Constantinople, but they were often moved to the borders to support the other body of troops, the thematic armies.

Each theme had a number of men who were granted permanent, hereditary land grants in return for military service. They drilled periodically and were expected to provide their own horse and arms. Although these peasant-soldiers were usually called on only to defend their home region, they might, in an emergency, be called up to fight elsewhere. On the surface, this may sound very similar to the western European feudal system, where a knight pledged military service in exchange for authority over a piece of land, but there are significant differences. The obligations of the landholder were tilted more in favor of the emperor, with few if any limits on how long he could call up the troops. In any case, the emperor was a far more absolute ruler than any feudal landlord, and he could change the details of any prior agreement at will. The amount of land granted was also smaller (a modest but adequate farm) and didn't include any kind of increased legal authority. On the other hand, the land granted to the thematic troops was completely inalienable except in case of imperial decree. That is, it could not be sold to or seized by anybody else. This ensured a population of relatively free peasants, preventing the rise of powerful provincial landlords who might threaten imperial authority. It also means that characters used to swaggering into villages and torturing peasants for information are in for a rude awakening if they try to pull that stunt in the Byzantine empire. Many villages will have at least a handful of veterans, and in some, every head of household will be a part-time soldier. Coastal regions had thematic fleets as well as thematic armies. Like the thematic armies, they could be called on to join imperial forces in time of need.

Division of Powers and Finance

Despite the Byzantine reliance on diplomacy, there was nothing analogous to a modern state department or foreign ministry, nor any career diplomats. Diplomatic functions were shared between the imperial household and a number of officials (most notably the logothete of the dromos and the chancellor) who had diplomacy as just one of many duties. To complicate matters, the church sometimes performed semi-official diplomatic duties as well, having missionaries do double-duty as diplomats. However, rather than carrying out confused, conflicting orders, the whole Byzantine bureaucracy was well-trained in diplomatic practice, giving the empire a significant edge in international affairs. In addition to a well-oiled, eloquent bureaucratic machine, Byzantine diplomats could use the empire's wealth to sway rulers or support local partisans, send missionaries to raise supportive converts, or use Byzantine and (more likely) allied military power as a threat. One subtle but apparently effective practice was to invite relatives of a ruler to live in Constantinople itself. The lure of life in the city was strong; Constantinople was well-known for its grandeur and luxury, so many people wanted to spend some time there. This allowed the Byzantines to cultivate members of other nations' ruling families as allies at the same time as it gave them hostages to ensure the amicable behavior of the foreign rulers. Needless to say, diplomatic life is rife with possibilities for adventure.

Still, the vague division of functions was something which had to be worked out again and again. For example, protecting the emperor was a task which fell to at least three high officials (the logothete of the dromos, the chamberlain, and the eparch of the city) as well as at least two domestics, while treasury functions were carried out by both the sakellarios and the logothetes of the genikon. Moreover, there was little in the way of a chain of command, and "chief of staff" would have been an alien concept to a Byzantine bureaucrat; over sixty high officials were responsible directly to the emperor. The key to making it work was having intelligent, flexible bureaucrats sharing and dividing tasks to best suit the situation. An important thing to keep in mind about the Byzantine bureaucracy is that it was not staffed by dull, unimaginative drones, like a stereotypical modern bureaucracy. The typical Byzantine bureaucrat was certainly educated, probably ambitious, and likely very intelligent, and he might move between a variety of different tasks through the course of his career. A career in the imperial government was both prestigious and lucrative, and it required considerable professional and social skills to get ahead, so it attracted very able individuals. For PCs, dealing with a Byzantine bureaucrat will be more like a diplomatic negotiation and less like a trip to the DMV.

All of these activities had to be financed somehow (particularly diplomacy; the empire dealt with acute problems by throwing buckets of gold at them), and the empire had a number of ways to get the money and goods it needed. Some government activities could be funded by the emperor's personal wealth or the holdings of officials undertaking a task, but most of the money had to come from taxes, fees, and income from imperial enterprises. The imperial government held lucrative monopolies on a number of industries, such as silk production. The silk was grown in and around Constantinople and woven into cloth at a factory in the palace district, apparently producing some very fine material. Some government services and even offices would only be granted with the payment of fees. Characters who intrigue in Constantinople may find themselves paying some hefty fees if they want to advance their position, or even to get access to high officials. Merchant characters should be aware that imported goods were subject to tariffs of up to 12.5%. The government could also force merchants and tradesmen to sell their goods at a fixed (and very low) price. And, of course, there were conventional head and land taxes for peasants, which were as heavy as anywhere else. The empire went back and forth between monetary taxes and taxes in kind, but the state of the Byzantine economy generally allowed the government to extract taxes in money rather than in goods. One fringe benefit of being a soldier, a veteran, or a titled official was exemption from some or all taxes, so Byzantine PCs with a military background will be at something of an economic advantage.

Ceremonies

Life in and around the imperial court was one of constant ceremony, in which high officials were required to participate. Public and semi-public audiences, banquets, processions, life events (birthdays, weddings, and such), observations of saints' days, public announcements, reception of officials, dispensing awards, and more had various levels of ceremony attached to them. The emperor himself usually appeared wearing some degree of impressive regalia

and surrounded by the smoke of incense. Those present at the ceremony had to, as a rule, remain silent unless spoken to and prostrate themselves if they came before the emperor. Doing something wrong (loudly dropping a metal helmet, fainting from the heat) will probably make one the object of gossip and intentionally interfering with a ceremony will make one extremely unpopular. But as tedious as it might seem, it is through these daily rituals that court intrigue was often carried out. Inclusion in a ceremonial occasion puts one in close proximity to the emperor, or at least in touch with those close to the emperor. Ambitious characters in the Byzantine empire will jockey quietly but fiercely to be included, even in small ways, in court ceremonies. It is through those that they have the best chance to meet and cultivate powerful officials.

To reproduce the feel of life at court, the GM may want to assemble his own ceremonies for any significant occasion. Here's a list of some elements (feel free to add your own) which could be used to assemble everyday ceremonies:

- Prayer
- Introductions
- Announcements (the emperor is entering, the emperor is sitting down, the emperor is leaving, etc.)
- Formulaic questions and responses
- Procession of individuals (candidates for offices, representative of an official)
- Display of official regalia and goods
- Presentation of gifts to a recipient
- Censing with incense smoke
- Musical sounds (ringing bells, horn fanfare)
- Lighting/putting out lamps or candles
- Ritual domestic gestures (breaking bread, anointing with oil, washing)

The GM will also want to consider time, place, costume, and potential audience for the ceremony. For example, a ceremony where the emperor gives charity to the poor might go something like this: On a given saint's day, the emperor is to appear at a particular church (a church of Hagios Nikolas seems appropriate). At a particular hour in the late morning, before an audience of senators, high officials, and a few picturesque commoners, a chamberlain carries in a golden stool (probably just gold-plated wood, but the appearance is the important thing) and sets it down before the altar. To the ringing of a small bell, a priest enters with a censer of incense and wafts smoke over the chair. The emperor then enters, preceded and followed by retainers, and sits on the stool. One of the retainers, standing to his right, takes off an embroidered gold cloak to reveal a red robe. The other retainer stands to his left, carrying a silk purse on a cushion. The priest, at the altar, makes a brief prayer. The emperor rises and, using prescribed language, calls forward a humble servant of God. A carefully chosen beggar is ushered forward and prostrates himself before the emperor. The priest brings the emperor a pitcher of water, of which he drizzles a few drops on the beggar's head. With another prescribed speech, the emperor hand the beggar the purse and the retainer puts the emperor's cloak on him. The beggar backs away, there's another prayer, and the emperor leaves, followed by the retainers and the chamberlain with the stool.

The details may sound tedious, but observing the correct forms was extremely important to the Byzantine court. Anyone who wants to move in those circles will have to put up with a lot of that sort of thing. After all, this trivial event unites a large chunk of the empire's ruling class in one place, giving PCs an opportunity to hook up with powerful connections and the GM some amusing hoops to make PCs jump through.

Titles and Succession

Byzantine officials accumulated long lists of personal titles (separate from job titles) through their careers. During this period, there was a hierarchy of at least eighteen titles (plus another eight for eunuchs), many of which were variants on others. For example, one could be a hypatos (consul), dishypatos (twice-consul), or even anthypatos (proconsul). Like offices, titles could have little relationship to their current meaning. For example, protospatharios, literally meaning "first sword-bearer," simply signified someone of senatorial rank. Over the centuries, there was a phenomenon of title inflation. That is, a title would be awarded to so many people that it would become essentially worthless, and the emperor would have to come up with a new title with which to reward distinguished service. This is another case where the GM should feel free to make things up (most noble, double-wise, venerated, etc.) without fear

of historical inaccuracy. Unlike titles in the west, Byzantine titles and offices were not hereditary. There was certainly an aristocratic class from which ministers and officials were appointed, but actual titles and offices were acquired, not inherited. About the only truly hereditary position in the empire was that of the peasant-soldiers of the thematic armies. A father's military obligation passed to his oldest son.

Even the imperial throne was not, strictly speaking, directly hereditary. When the crown passed peacefully, it usually went from the emperor to a son or, if he had no sons, a brother or nephew. However, just being the emperor's closest relative was never good enough. A sitting emperor would appoint a junior co-emperor, often but not always a close relative, following the pattern set by Diocletian so many years earlier. By the 7th century, the junior emperor held no actual power, but it did set up a clear line of succession. About the only restriction on becoming an emperor was that he be a "whole man." One or two exceptional examples aside, physical disability, mutilation, or being a eunuch prohibited one from the throne. A grisly consequence of this restriction is that in hotly contested successions and after revolts, potential rivals to the throne might be disfigured (cutting off the nose was common) to keep them out of the way permanently. Likewise, women were traditionally prohibited from holding the crown, again with one or two significant exceptions. But, as with most other governments of the age, just about anyone, regardless of age, sex, nationality, or disability, who could take the throne by force could keep it.

Church

The imperial government was a big factor in the lives of the rich and powerful, their hangers-on, and those who aspired to that lifestyle, but there was an even more pervasive factor in *everybody's* life in the Byzantine empire: Orthodox Christianity. Just as Roman Catholicism dominated many aspects of life in western Europe through the Middle Ages, Orthodoxy formed the basis for art, philosophy, morality, and other aspects of Byzantine life, as well as shaping the spiritual life of Russia and large chunks of eastern Europe. Orthodoxy is, strictly speaking, just one of several strains of Christian practice and doctrine that arose in the first few centuries of Christianity, only slowly taking shape as its own religion. It grew out of the great mass of early Christianity which also produced Roman Catholicism. In fact, in late antiquity and the early Middle Ages, there wasn't a sharp division between the eastern and western churches. Rather, they regarded themselves collectively as one large church, unified in doctrine if divided by language and distance. It took centuries for what started out as an administrative division to turn into something far deeper.

Authority and Hierarchy

In the early church (and in Orthodoxy to the present day), there was no one ultimate clerical authority. The emperor, certainly, had an important part in spiritual matters. From the time of Constantine, the emperor had a special relationship with the church. The emperor championed Christianity as the one true religion, while the church supported the emperor as the one true ruler of the world. Although he was technically a layman, the emperor was considered the protector of the church and Christians everywhere. Indeed, treaties with the pre-Islamic kings of Persia acknowledge the emperor as the lawful ruler of any Christians in Persia. The emperor also held temporal authority over clergy. Unlike the west, where clergy accused of crimes were often tried in the church's own (and fairly sympathetic) courts under separate legal codes, called "canon law," eastern clergy were subject to imperial law and imperial courts. But while his temporal authority was unlimited, he had little authority over spiritual matters. If he angered church leaders, they could and did prohibit him from entering churches and otherwise make his life more difficult. One emperor jeopardized his reign by marrying a third and then a fourth time after his previous wives died (Orthodoxy limits people to two spouses; the feeling is that if both die, God clearly doesn't want you to be married). There were no Henry VIIIs in the Byzantine empire.

But while the emperor had no direct power over church doctrine, he had the authority to call large convocations of bishops (ecumenical councils) to debate and resolve doctrinal issues. It was at these councils, which could involve hundreds of bishops from all over the Christian world, that fundamental questions of doctrine and practice were decided. For example, the Nicene creed, one of the fundamental statements of Christian faith, was the product of a conference of bishops called by Constantine I. The ecumenical councils were subject to enormous political wrangling. Thus an emperor or prominent bishop convening a council might "stack the deck," arranging for a majority of bishops sympathetic to his position to come, or a faction which fears losing a final decision might attempt to disrupt a council

before it can reach a conclusion. Even if PCs are not themselves terribly concerned with religious matters (and even if they're nowhere near the empire), they may be easily drawn into the intrigues of an ecumenical council, performing tasks from escort to espionage to lobbying to assassination.

At any rate, such councils could only address the largest questions, and they took place decades -- even centuries -- apart, so they couldn't perform day-to-day administration. The functional head of the eastern church, then, was the metropolitan bishop of Constantinople, usually called the patriarch. At the end of antiquity, five cities had bishoprics of supreme importance, called patriarchal sees: Rome, Constantinople, Antioch, Alexandria, and Jerusalem, in descending order of precedence. By the end of the seventh century, Jerusalem, Antioch, and Alexandria were in the hands of the Muslims, leaving Rome and Constantinople as the remaining centers of Christianity. The eastern patriarchates still oversaw large Christian populations, but they operated under the sufferance of Muslim rulers who were at best indifferent to their religion. The patriarch of Constantinople, therefore, was responsible for setting the tone for Orthodox doctrine and church policy for the empire and regions converted to Christianity by Orthodox missionaries, including Russia and most of the Balkan peninsula. In addition to being the spiritual leader for a large region, a patriarch had considerable administrative power, including the right to approve new senior clergy in his territory. Because of the usually close relationship between religion and politics, this could be a tool of considerable power. The emperor had authority to select the patriarch when the post became vacant, and emperors sometimes deposed particularly contrary patriarchs, but it could be a risky move if the sitting patriarch was popular in the city. The patriarch was often a close advisor to the emperor. Some patriarchs assumed responsibility for educating the emperor's children, and a few served as regent in Constantinople for emperors in the field during wartime.

Orthodox Practice

Orthodox practice takes a form which other Christians would find reasonably familiar: celebrations of saints' days, ritual fasting, communion at mass, people crossing themselves, and so on. However, there are some differences in detail. For example, Orthodox priests are allowed to marry. Despite that, Orthodoxy is relatively ascetic. The calendar is filled with fasting days of varying degrees of severity (meat is prohibited on some days, all animal foods on others, yet others call for avoidance of oils or alcohol), and unlike the Carnival festivities of the Catholic world, the Orthodox get a jump on Lent and start fasting several days in advance. The Orthodox hierarchy is fairly flat: priests governed by bishops (who usually have a sizable city as a seat), administered by an archbishop or patriarch. As in the west, there were a great many cloistered monks, very few of whom were priests as well. The Orthodox never developed anything like the west's mendicant orders (monks who lived in the secular world rather than segregated in monasteries), but they did produce some fairly exotic religious types. Rather than living in a monastic community, some radical ascetics would flee to live as hermits in the wilderness or, more strangely, live closer to civilization but in limited circumstances. Particularly notable are the stylite monks, religious devotees who took to living on the tops of old columns, exposed to the elements for years at a time and depending on the charity of passers-by. While this may sound like the Medieval equivalent of flagpole-sitting, stylites were revered as extremely holy men, and people would often go to them for blessings or advice. Likewise, characters might have to approach a stylite for aid or information.

Orthodox services may appear casual to the uninformed observer. Rather than sitting quietly or following a detailed choreography through services, members of the congregation will dribble into the church to pray, light candles, and perform other private observances (and perhaps carry on hushed conversations) while the priest performs subsidiary rites. Only part of the service involves the congregation paying quiet attention to the priest. The congregation stands through services; Orthodox churches don't, as a rule, have benches or pews, although they may have a little seating for the elderly and infirm. Orthodox services are performed in the language of the congregation: Greek in the Byzantine empire, Russian in Russia (the Cyrillic alphabet, used for Russian and other Eastern European languages, was invented by the Byzantine Orthodox missionary St. Cyril, thereby greatly assisting the growth of Christianity in northeastern Europe), and so on.

The typical Byzantine church had at its core an aisle, a broad chamber running the length of the building, ending in a semi-circular apse. Churches had aisles in odd numbers: one for a small church, three or five for a large one, with the center aisle often being larger and more important. Multiple aisles would be separated by pillars or even walls and could be used as completely separate rooms, either for ceremonies or as "office space." Byzantine churches were as lavishly decorated as their western counterparts, although in a somewhat different style. Mosaic survived as a major

art form longer in the Byzantine empire than it did most other places. Visitors might be dazzled by walls apparently decorated with murals made from gems and gold, although they're actually composed of tiny glass blocks and flakes of gold leaf laminated between paper-thin layers of glass. An Orthodox church will also have an iconostasis (a rack for displaying icons), itself lavishly decorated, near the altar.

Relics

Like their western cousins, the Orthodox were quite fond of relics, the physical remains and possessions of saints, often thought to have extraordinary powers, usually for healing, protection, and converting sinners and heathens. They were also used to seal oaths. As in the west, relics were kept in elaborate containers called reliquaries, ranging in size from small pendants to large cabinets. Reliquaries were usually made of precious metals and decorated with gems. They could be quite valuable themselves (and subject to theft by non-Christian or simply not-very-devout thieves), although not nearly so valuable as their contents.

The Orthodox also had a claim on having the biggest relic of all: the True Cross. Tradition has it that Helena, mother of Constantine I and a future saint, found it in Jerusalem after coercing an uncooperative native who knew where it was buried. The bulk of it stayed in Jerusalem, although fragments of it were distributed through the Christian world. The Cross changed hands several times, falling to the Persians when they briefly took Jerusalem in the early seventh century, then back to the Byzantines, who recovered it when they sacked the Persian capital about ten years later. Accounts start to diverge here. At least part of the Cross returned to Jerusalem, while a substantial chunk may have gone to Constantinople. The Jerusalem fragment went out of sight occasionally, but it remained in Christian hands until the Third Crusade, when it was removed by Saladin. The Constantinople fragment reportedly remained in the capital at least until the fourteenth century.

If PCs are looking for a big quest, the search for the True Cross certainly fits the bill, and there many periods when someone would have to go looking for it. For example, 7th century knights of the Merovingian king Clotaire II might head to Persia to recover it before advancing Byzantine armies can get their hands on it, or 13th century pilgrims might search for the missing Cross as a weapon against the Mongols threatening Europe at the time. A quest for the True Cross might even be part of a search for the "triple crown" of Christian relics: the Cross, the Grail, and the spear of Longinus. It might be useful to note that, contrary to the belief that fragments purported to be from the True Cross would make their own forest, a study of purported fragments of the True Cross made in 1870 suggested that all known fragments would make up perhaps a third of a cross three to four meters tall. Still, several lifetimes could be spent reassembling all the fragments if that became necessary.

Orthodoxy and Everyday Life

Christian motifs and interpretations are rife in Byzantine culture and everyday life. Icons are everywhere, and biographies of saints are popular reading. More subtly, literate Byzantines were mostly taught from the same texts: the Bible and a number of common prayers. This common literary background had a profound influence on religious and even secular Byzantine literature. Offhand references to saints, phrases from prayers, and allusions to the Bible are common, and non-Orthodox readers may find some works a bit puzzling or at least miss the nuances even if they do know Greek. More broadly, good and bad luck are generally thought of as signs of God's favor or displeasure, and instructions and even mnemonic devices may be framed in Biblical terms. For example, if a carpenter usually uses two nails to secure a joint, he may explain it as one for Christ's human side, once for his divine nature. If he usually uses three nails, it'll be one for each member of the Trinity.

Heresy and Other Religions

Orthodoxy never had anything like the worst excesses of the late Medieval west, such as the Spanish Inquisition and chronic persecution of Jews, but neither could it be regarded as a particularly tolerant religion when it came to internal dissention. The name, after all, means "correct worship," so adhering to correct doctrine was extremely important. Moreover, because the emperor played a role as the protector of the church, doctrinal disputes often meant political disputes. Part of being the church's protector was persecuting heretics (meaning, in this context, Christians who weren't

strictly Orthodox), done with the enthusiastic support of Orthodox clergy. This ultimately led to problems in the provinces. Many non-Orthodox provincials came to think of the imperial government as the enemy and, when the Muslims invaded Syria and Egypt, the predominantly Monophysite and Nestorian provincials put up little resistance, regarding the Muslims as likely to be more congenial rulers than the Orthodox emperor. One of the ironies of Medieval life is that it was often safer to be a member of a religious minority (a Christian in a Muslim country, a Muslim in a Christian country, or a Jew anywhere until the Crusades) than to be a dissenting member of the predominant religion. Official persecutions were always a possibility, but usually a member of a minority religion would just be taxed more heavily, while a heretic could be beaten, imprisoned, exiled, and killed.

Official punishments aside, popular reactions could become extremely violent. Particularly vocal heretics were sometimes lynched by mobs or subjected to bizarre punishments. For example, two famed iconophile martyrs had iconoclastic verses written on their foreheads with red-hot irons. Heretical Christian characters can generally avoid these problems if they keep their mouths shut, although because the Byzantines are a people who love to talk about religion, that might be difficult. Characters known to be Jewish or Muslim (or, in later periods, foreign Roman Catholics) will probably be subject to conversion attempts ranging from friendly-but-pitying to hostile attacks on their current religion, and are likely to be somewhat shunned socially. Openly pagan characters will meet the same if they're lucky, but given the very negative feelings that Medieval Christians had about pagans, they might have to put up with far, far worse.

So what doctrinal differences led to widespread heresy? Iconoclasm, a dispute over the place of images in Christianity, has already been mentioned, but one of the big recurring issues in the history of Orthodoxy (and, indeed, in the history of Christianity as a whole) has to do with the relationship between the human and the divine in Christ. Questions arose around whether Christ had a divine nature, a human nature, or both. And, if he had both, what was the relationship between them, and how can that be reconciled with the doctrine of only one God? In either case, what was the quality of his human or divine nature? Was he typically human or a perfect human (like, say, Adam before the fall)? Was there something inferior about his divine nature? By "nature," do we mean his physical substance, his will, or something else? Was Christ made of the same substance as the Father, or just a similar substance? People died over the difference between the Greek terms for this distinction, *homoousion* vs. *homoiousion*, so don't ever let anybody tell you "an iota's difference" is small. And what was Mary's part in all of this? Was she the mother of Christ, or could she be considered the mother of God as well?

If this all seems rather convoluted and obscure, you can take comfort in knowing that the Byzantines themselves never completely settled the question. The Orthodox position was that Christ had both human and divine natures which were made of the same substance and equally united, but new dissenting opinions arose constantly and had to be dealt with over and over again. For example, the Monophysites, a major heresy in the early years of the empire, emphasized the divine in Christ, while the Nestorians, who constituted the bulk of far eastern Christians (Nestorians missionaries were making converts in China centuries before the Catholics made it that far), emphasized the human. The GM may create his own plausible heresies at will by introducing any variation on those themes, as well as variations involving the Holy Spirit as well as the Father and the Son.

In addition to heretics within the empire, the Orthodox had chronic problems with the Roman Catholics. The relationship between eastern and western believers was in constant decline through the Middle Ages. Again, the reasons were partly doctrinal, but were just as much political. The papacy pursued ambitions of complete autocratic supremacy over all of Christendom, while the Orthodox refused to acknowledge the Pope as anything more than a first among equals (and sometimes not even that) and objected to the papal habit of trying to set doctrine unilaterally rather than through consensus by ecumenical councils. This led to increasingly bitter exchanges between eastern and western bishops and disputes over administrative territories. Ultimately, there was a complete schism, with Catholics and Orthodox ignoring one another's authority, refusing one another communion, and so on. The traditional date for the schism between east and west is a spectacularly disastrous conference in 1054, but that really serves as a convenient historical date rather than a firm dividing line. Attempts at unity had been diminishing for centuries before and continued sporadically for centuries thereafter. In the last few Byzantine centuries, politically-minded patriarchs would sometimes make doctrinal concessions to the papacy in order to obtain western alliances against the advancing Turks, but they inevitably failed as the Orthodox rank-and-file rejected them.

Alternate Byzantiums

History, complex and interesting as it is, isn't always dramatically satisfying, so there's often an urge to tinker with it. Here are some ways of using the Byzantine empire in somewhat different ways.

Magical Byzantium

For most of history, pretty much everybody has believed in magic, and the Byzantines were no exception. The map of Europe and the Near East in this alternative may look the same as it does in our history, but things are . . . different. It is the last decade of the tenth century, and Leo the Wise is on the imperial throne. In addition to being pious and well educated in the classics, Leo has something bordering on prophetic abilities (volumes of prophecies incorrectly attributed to Leo did, in fact, circulate through the empire in later centuries), which he uses to guide his policies. The Byzantine empire is amply endowed with mystic resources. The churches contain relics and icons capable of healing the truly faithful (although one does have to be *truly* faithful to use them properly), and the libraries contain magical books by powerful ancient mystics such as Aristotle and Vergil (yes, the poet; he was believed by some Medievals to be a wizard). Across the frontier, the Muslims are exploring the powers of alchemy and the manipulation of djinni. In both the empire and the caliphate, magic is used sparingly and cautiously for religious reasons, usually limited to protective charms and amulets, but greater magics are certainly a possibility. The semi-civilized lands of the Slavs and Franks are still populated with solitary wizards and witches worshiping pagan spirits. Indeed, their rulers sometimes employ court magicians who hide behind a false veil of Christianity. Farther away from the centers of civilization are lands where monsters and spirits still walk openly. The faerie are abroad in the British isles and Scandinavia, and waves of northern invaders from the ancient Goths through the Huns and Slavs to the Turks now appearing in the far east bring tales of being driven from their old lands by dragons and worse.

Byzantine Catholicism

Both the Orthodox and Roman Catholic church claim "catholicism," a universal mission and authority, even if a history of schisms might give outsiders reason to question those claims. But if Rome was knocked out of the running early on and the empire was forced to pay more attention to its western borders, there might still be a relatively unified Christian church (or, at least, it could have remained united longer). In this alternate history, Germanic invaders were more resistant to conversion to Christianity, particularly the Roman flavor, than in our history. With pagan hordes bearing down on Rome, the popes couldn't afford to alienate their only natural ally, the Byzantine empire. A few activist popes aside, the bishops of Rome are content with a nominal place of honor as first among the patriarchs and otherwise act as a rubber stamp for Orthodox doctrine. Nevertheless, Christianity continues its slow progress into the north (particularly aided by Orthodox missionaries as part of a concerted Byzantine effort to secure its northern borders) and the feudal system arises, but western Europe assumes a more secular character. The Carolingians were contentious kings, not rulers of a "holy Roman empire." More money and power falls into the hands of feudal lords. Islam rises on schedule, and something like the Crusades happens, but on a smaller scale. Without a powerful Roman church using it, Latin has long since ceased to exist as an international language. As civic life recovers, western cities take to governing themselves semi-democratically, using the only model they can find, that of ancient Greek cities.

The year is 1200 AD. The Byzantine empire holds Italy south of Florence, the southern end of the Balkan peninsula and most of Anatolia, although the eastern border is fluid and companies of western mercenaries brought in to fight the infiltrating Turks are notoriously unreliable. Burgundy (southeastern France with chunks of Switzerland and northern Italy) and France (most of central and northeast modern France; Britany and Normandy are independent dutchies) are the greatest powers of the west, with vigorous if capricious city-states occupying northern Italy and France's Mediterranean coast and Germany and England a patchwork of squabbling princedoms. Sadly, warfare is endemic but largely confined to border conflicts rather than large conquests. The Iberian peninsula is a crumbling Muslim emirate; Christian territories in the northeast are threatening to break away. Constantinople has been the first city of Christendom for centuries, but the slow rise of western Europe is challenging its policies. The theological concerns of the day center on widespread survival of what Orthodox hard-liners call pagan ritual in northern and western Europe, far from the learned councils of the empire. The supporters of such rituals claim that they are, in fact, practices of a Christian character, much as the adoration of icons is not the idol-worship of the pagans. The schismatic

archbishop of Dublin, long a dissenter from the mainstream of Christian thought, is considering distancing himself from both Orthodox and "nativists," declaring himself a patriarch, and excommunicating the bishops of Rome and Constantinople. Can Christendom weather another storm of dissention? And can it pull itself together in time to face the Mongol invasions coming in a few decades?

Battle-teknos

Byzantine mecha? Why not. The Byzantine empire had simple steam engines (albeit mere toys compared to the first practical steam engines developed in during the Age of Enlightenment) since antiquity, as well as gearing and hydraulics sufficient to produce amusing mechanical animals. From the seventh century, they also had Greek fire, about which we know sufficiently little to let us speculate wildly. In this history's early ninth century, an anonymous military engineer in Constantinople combined these elements into a powerful Greek fire-fueled piston steam engine, kicking off the Age of Steam a thousand years ahead of schedule and without coal. The first application of the engine was a paddlewheeled barge, a simple but clever adaptation of tethered grain-milling rafts. It was unimpressive, but within a few generations, the empire was fielding a small but powerful fleet of ironclad warships and a number of walking fighting platforms, shaped like griffins, lions, and elephants.

The year is 1000 AD, and variants on Greek fire and the engines they fuel are wreaking tremendous changes. Originally dangerous and temperamental, the engines are now relatively reliable and increasingly powerful. Not only are they useful for transportation, they are being employed within the empire to pump water, saw wood, weave cloth, drill holes, and drive blast furnaces (leading, in turn, to cast iron and steel in industrial quantities, making bigger and better machines possible). Byzantine dominance of the Mediterranean as far west as Marsailles is near-total, although the short range of Byzantine steamships keeps them close to port. Byzantine progress into the Balkans has been slow, with the mountainous terrain proving nearly impassable to the walking Byzantine war machines. But Slavic kings, intimidated by Byzantine power, have given up challenging the impregnable Byzantine defenses and settled down to become valuable allies. Progress in the east has been faster. Building-sized metal war machines, armed with swinging scythes and rattling chains, have driven Muslim raiders away. After fifty years of construction, the empire now has a complete trans-Anatolian railway, allowing dispatches, troops, and supplies to be sent from Constantinople to reconquered Antioch in mere days. Spurs from the main line are being planned to speed communications throughout the interior. The army has advanced even farther. Byzantine war machines now stride through most of Syria and Mesopotamia, and the Black Sea is a Byzantine lake. Jerusalem is in Byzantine hands, Damascus and Baghdad are within reach, and can Egypt be far behind? Military might aside, steam-powered Byzantine industries are leaving foreign hand-powered industry in the dust, making the empire an economic powerhouse and raising the Byzantine standard of living to unprecedented levels. There are some challenges on the horizon, however. Nothing can be a secret forever. The Muslims have developed Greek fire, or something analogous to it using the black puddles of petroleum sometimes found bubbling to the surface through the Near East, and are starting to field their own battlefield machines (any players making jokes about "mecha from Mecca" may be beaten soundly). And after two centuries of increasing use, the empire also shows signs of straining its fuel supplies and must find substitutes or new formulations. Despite the new invention, the technology of this setting is still largely Medieval and gunpowder is still centuries away. Fighting machines may have a fire siphon or two, but no guns, and most of their fighting is, for lack of a better term, hand to hand.

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A Dozen Good Souls

Populating Your Action Hero World

by Brian Rogers

It's fact that every game needs Non-Player Characters. There must be people for the players to interact with. In fantasy or any other genre where the heroes move around a lot, the GM must create a lot of NPCs but they can be pretty shallow; if the PCs are only going to be in town long enough to kill the local monsters and loot their hoard, then we don't need to know too much about the innkeeper. A few character quirks and his chance to hit with his crossbow should be fine. After all, the heroes will leave in a session or two and it will be years, if ever, before this innkeeper turns up again.

This isn't true in other genres: superheroes, action heroes, and anyone else operating in the contemporary time period have a tendency to spend a lot of time in one locale. Most modern heroes seldom leave their own city, preferring to adventure in their backyard whenever possible. When they *do* travel, they call up their usual NPCs for help and support ("Hi, Bill. I'm in Istanbul. Yeah, don't ask. I need you to search the FBI files on this terrorist group . . . ") This gives you as GM a different challenge: balancing a circle of NPCs around the players to make the world seem populated without doing too much work.

The On-Call Rule

In heroic serial fiction, the author has to be aware of two things: first, the audience either has a limited memory or won't be exposed to each episode. Second, the audience likes to feel comfortable. The solution is to cut down the supporting cast, then use them repeatedly. Now once the audience has been introduced to the character, they'll know who that guy is in every following episode. If a viewer misses a couple months, upon his return the familiar heroes are visiting their familiar supporting cast. Some things may have changed, but the viewer isn't lost. It works for the writers too, since they can rely on those characters for cameos and not waste time introducing another old flame or street contact. End result: stability and continuity for the writers, the actors, and the audience.

Action hero gaming can work the same way. If you introduce an NPC and the players enjoy the interaction with the NPC (be it that they like him or hate him), keep him on call. Next time they need a similar NPC, there he is, ready and waiting for his screen time. The players are happy, because they know the guy already. You should be happy because you don't have to make up another NPC.

As a general rule, you shouldn't have more than a dozen NPCs on call. Anything more than that and the players can start to lose track of who's who . . . especially if your game meets less often than once a week. With a dozen NPCs you can provide the heroes with enough of a supporting cast for the world to feel real without swamping yourself. If it looks like you're going to have more than a dozen NPCs, start giving some of them double duty; not only is old Van Gargan the guy who runs the heroes' favorite bar, he also has a bunch of shady contacts. Boom! Now he's both their bartender and one of their contacts. The heroes go to Gargan's place, bend his ear with their relationship problems, make their plans for taking on the mob in his back booth, and belly up to the bar to find out what's happening on the street.

Building Your Sets

Heroes generally hang out in a limited number of places: their house, the local bar, the police precinct, the offices of a great metropolitan newspaper. In TV shows there's a legitimate reason for limiting travel: those sets cost money. Comic books don't have that restriction (since the artist could draw anywhere for no extra cost), but they often do the same thing. Why? Because places, once you lavish enough attention on them, gain personalities of their own,

becoming as much a part of the continuity as the NPCs. An action GM should develop a few set pieces to a high enough level of detail that the Players know what it looks like and what they can expect.

What sets should you use? Well the first couple will be self-evident, based on what the characters do for a living. After that, keep an eye out for places that the PCs visit and enjoyed: if they defend a local bar from extortionists in one episode, open the next episode with the heroes at that bar, enjoying a round on the owner. Make it the place to go during their downtime. It's convenient, since you already have maps if you need to stage a fight there, and it makes another part of the world a little more real. Make a quick list of the wait staff, make changes to the place over time, make the characters care about the bar. When the villains blow it up, it will get the heroes much more angry.

As with On-Call characters, you should have a functional limit on re-used sets. Generally this works out to six or so. This is as many places as the players are going to ever care deeply about, and if you get bored with one, have something catastrophic happen to it and introduce a new one in its place. For each place, keep a sketch map and description, along with a list of names and quirks for walk-on parts. Obviously, many of these sets will be attached to on-call characters. This sets up a virtuous circle, where the NPCs feel more real from their environment and the setting feels more real because of the characters.

The Supporting Cast: Ensemble Fun

There are some characters who will be important to the heroes just because they're always around: the secretary, the file clerk, the co-worker, the boss. These are people who don't get involved in the plot every week, but are there day in and day out. They're the people whose name credits appear right after the heroes and before this week's special guest villain. This makes them simultaneously important and, well, boring. In action packed games, the best they can do is to give the heroes a moment of humanity, showing their friendly sides before they're forced to go off and fight more drug-dealing terrorists. These ensembles occupy the same place, dealing with each other as much (or more) than they deal with the heroes.

Since they have such minor parts, the GM can usually get away with a few sketchy descriptions of the perky secretary, the demanding boss, the grumbling file clerk, the happily married co-worker. The hero flirts with the secretary, trades jibes with the file clerk, envies his co-worker, and gets this week's assignment from the demanding boss. Then it's back to the action. This is a wonderful low impact way for the GM to start the game, letting the ensemble characters grow over time.

Generally, an ensemble cast shouldn't be more than four or five characters. The GM can keep track of them by developing a rough "relationship" chart: one circle for each character with a brief description, then lines connecting them with the other members of the ensemble, showing how they react to one another. Watching a few episodes of any well-done ensemble sit com will show you how these work. Once you have the ensemble feel, you can handle the interactions between the NPCs as well as those between the NPCs and players characters. Once again, the goal is to make these characters feel real, that they exist even when the player characters aren't looking at them.

Contacts: Limit Two Per Team

Heroes like to be in the know, having contacts and informants to whom they can turn to get the drop on their opponents. This works fine for the GM, because it makes it easier to keep the plot moving. But how many contacts do they need to have? No more than two for the whole group. With two contacts, the heroes have a way of confirming information. With two contacts, you can give different heroes different sources. While this may split the party up, it does give each hero a few minutes in the spotlight. If you don't give either contact all of the information, the players will feel like they produced something useful, not that they wasted time getting the same flavor text through a different mouthpiece.

For example, the PCs are looking for someone who has evidence against a mob leader; not surprisingly, the mob leader is looking for him too, and has put out a price on the guy's head. Contact A tells the heroes that a street gang looking for cash is on its way to the downtown market. Contact B tells them that the mob leader has hired a pricey out-

of-town assassin and sent him to the downtown market. No matter which contact the players talk to, they know to go to the downtown market to find their informant. If they check with both, not only can they confirm the main information, but have a much better idea as to what they're up against: assassins, street gangs and shop clerks, oh my!

You may think that if two contacts is good, then four contacts would be even better. I wouldn't bet on it. Most people only have a limited amount of game time, and the goal is to keep things moving . . . especially in the action-hero genre. Each time the PCs visit a contact, it's that much more time that a) there isn't something explosively interesting going on and b) the other players might be bored waiting for you to remember them. Plus, each contact you have in the game is one more NPC that you have to develop and maintain. Now, if your group really grooves on investigation and you have unlimited amounts of time, by all means add more . . . just keep an eye out for bored players if the information gathering goes on too long.

Backstories: Everyone Has a Hook

A final piece of advice for putting together a supporting cast: everyone has an adventure hook. Everyone. It might not come up right away, it might never come up at all, but every one of your on call characters has an adventure hook. These adventure hooks are the characters secrets, and reveal their dynamic energy, point them in a direction and highlight their personality. Roger Zelazny would write a short story about the major characters in his novels . . . things that most often would never be published, but would give him some insight into the characters' goals and motivations. This is essentially the same technique.

In many cases, this is a backstory hook. The NPC has something in his past that will come up to bite the PCs sooner or later. This needn't be as dramatic as the character being on the run from the mob, though that sort of violent background is possible. Maybe the character has a child now in the custody of an ex-spouse or foster home, has gambling debts he's trying to pay off, or was a violent youth who now lives a quiet life. These are people's hidden secrets, and once you know them you know what makes the NPC tick. The guy on the run from the mob probably eschews publicity and doesn't make friends easily; the distant parent could have little faith in relationships, or get a lost look in his eye whenever children turn up; the gambler is constantly broke and looking for the big score; the former gang-banger could avoid violence entirely, going of his way to try and reform others. Knowing these secrets gives you insight into their psyches, making your portrayals more real. Characters feel more real when you know that there are things you don't know; defining by an absence is an important but underused tool in characterization.

Other characters have fore-story: their adventure hook is something that hasn't happened yet. For example, the heroes know a lab-bound scientist, a bookworm chemistry genius. His adventure hook isn't something he's done, it's something he will do sooner or later (i.e., when you need a new plot); for example, the chemist will develop something astounding, such as a regeneration serum. You can define this character's personality by what he will do, explaining why he spends forever in the lab, what his goals are, and what he intends to do with his miracle. Again, the heroes may never learn what the character is working on, or it may never come to fruition. If you don't end up using the hook it's a piece of characterization. If you do, it's brilliant foreshadowing and your players will think you're a genius.

One big advantage to this technique is that you'll never be lost for a plot some Saturday afternoon. Even if the heroes have taken out the master villain with three hours left to play, you still have a hook for each and every one of your dozen on call NPCs. The PCs get back to the office and find the grumbling file clerk in hysterics. One cup of coffee later, he reveals that his lawyer ex-wife called: someone kidnapped their son, and will kill Timmy if she doesn't throw her current case. Bang! The PCs are off to teach some mobsters not to threaten kids, and you have something for them to do with the remainder of the session.

Action heroes live in a tough world, but this doesn't make populating it a tough task. Develop a few detailed characters for them to talk to, and a few detailed sets for them to talk in, and the world will seem real . . . even if it is the imaginary equivalent of cardboard sets and walk on actors.

Superheroes Anonymous

Optional Super Advantages and Super Disadvantages for *GURPS*

by Dmitri Scull

What follows is an assortment of "fill in the gaps" advantages and disadvantages, appropriate for use as racial or super traits. Some of them, such as Universal Translator, are even moderately common powers. Body of Electricity is derived from the Body of Lightning spell in *GURPS Grimoire*; it's also good for lightning-wielding superheroes.

Emotion Field is designed to represent supernatural auras that key emotions, such as a lust aura emitted by a succubus or an aura of terror surrounding a more traditional demon. It works just as well for superheroes (and supervillains).

Irritant is a good minor disadvantage for nocturnal and supernatural races, it can even be used to represent an allergic reaction, in which case it is a good mundane disadvantage. Light Bones is good for avian races (or those descended from avian races) that have some combat ability, as such races would have heavier frames than avian races built only for flight.

Advantages

Body of Electricity

80 points

The character is composed entirely of electricity, rather than flesh and blood. You are immune to the effects of electricity and beam weapons, and physical attacks pass through you, but you cannot pick anything up. Your touch does electrical damage equal to your punching damage, as does direct contact with you through a metal object (such as a sword), but you can only deliver damage once per turn; others merely receive a nasty shock. You retain your senses and may cast spells at a -2 penalty. You can also travel through an electrical conductor; at ten times your normal Move, and while in an object you are immune to harm, but a ST -5 roll is required to leave it. Unlike the Body of Lightning spell in *Grimoire*, you still need to breathe, and you cannot do so while inside a conductor.

Special Enhancements: Objects may be carried. They change into electrical form when picked up, and turn back when set down. +10% for No Encumbrance, +20% for Light, +50% for Medium, and +100% for Heavy.

Special Limitation: You cannot switch out of Body of Electricity form; you are stuck in it. You cannot touch anything without damaging it and are insubstantial (however, you have no penalty to cast magic if you cannot leave this form). This is treated as a Disadvantage worth -10 points. If you can carry objects, use the percentage to reduce the value of the disadvantage, as with Body of Air.

Emotion Field **10 points for first level, 5 points for each additional level**

The character radiates a field that triggers a specific emotion in all who come within the area of the field. The field fills the caster's hex(es) at first level, and radiates out 1 hex per additional level. The emotion must be specified at character creation (such as fear). All within the area must make a HT roll or be overcome by the emotion. If there are circumstances that would enhance the emotion (such as a being of incredible beauty in the presence of a lust aura or a ferocious beast in the presence of a fear aura) the HT roll can be modified by as much as -5 (there is no corresponding bonus, however). If the victim critically fails the HT roll, the victim is subject to severe penalties (for fear, treat as a failed Fright Check, for other emotions, use similarly strong penalties, but appropriate for the emotion).

Special Enhancement: The character can inspire more than a single emotion; +25% for each additional emotion possible; or +200% if the character can inspire any emotion.

Special Limitation: The character cannot turn the field off. -50% for emotions that cause others to react negatively (like fear) to -10% for emotions that merely cause problems (such as love). There is no reduction if the emotion would not be a hindrance (like trust).

Universal Translator

Variable cost

The character can communicate with any intelligent being (for unintelligent creatures, buy Speak with Animals, Speak with Fish, or Speak with Plants). The level of communication sets the base cost of this advantage; if the character can only "send" empathic cues, this is worth 10 points. If this is telepathic communication (which does not count as contact for psionic abilities, and is not necessarily psionic or magical in nature) it is worth 15 points. If the target can understand the character's spoken words, but is aware that there is translation occurring, it is worth 20 points, and if the target hears his own language (and is unaware of any translation, unless it is pointed out to him) it is worth 25 points. If either of the latter two forms include telepathic communication, add 10 points to them. Only one person at a time may be "translated" to.

Special Enhancement: Everyone within earshot can understand you, but you cannot "single out" a target, +10%. If you can choose to speak to one person or to everyone, it is worth +20%.

Special Limitations: If only certain beings can understand you, that is a limitation. For a rough, general class (elementals, humanoid beings, etc.) it is worth -10%. If limited to a rough "family" of beings (such as mammalian humanoids or avians) it is worth -30%. If limited to a single race or group of related races (including subraces, such as elves or orcs), it is worth -50%.

Disadvantages

Body of Electricity

-10 points

If you cannot switch out of Body of Electricity form, it is a Disadvantage. See the Body of Electricity Advantage above for details.

Irritant

Variable cost

You have a weakness to a substance that, while it does not inhibit your actions or cause you harm, it does distract you; you are at -1 to all rolls while in contact with the Irritant substance. Cost is based on rarity of the substance or situation; very common situations (like sunlight) are worth -5 points. Common items, such as high humidity or temperature are worth -4 points. Uncommon items or situations (such as dusty areas, very high humidity, rain) are worth -3 points. Rare situations or items, such as a specific metal (like silver) are worth -2 points. A very rare substance, such as gems or weak acid is basically a quirk, worth -1 point. Note that the individual can take pains (and likely does) to avoid the substance; a heavy cloak to shield from the sun, etc.

Light Bones

-5/-10 points

The character's bone structure is especially light; this is essentially a lesser form of the Fragile Disadvantage. For -5 points, you take 125% damage from crushing weapons; for -10 points, you take 150% damage.

Pyramid Review

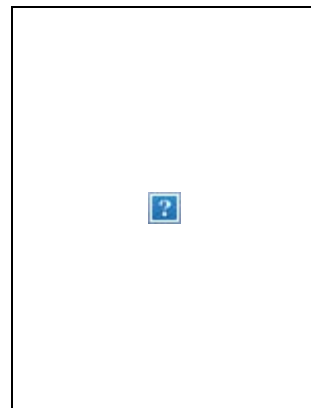
Dark Tower (for d20)

Published by [Judges Guild](#) through RPG Realms

Written by Paul Jaquays with Bruce Runnels

Illustrated by Jason Millet, Steve Bryant & Chad Fidler

\$16.95



The advent of the *d20 System* and its associate Open Gaming License has launched a plethora of new publishers of adventures and supplements for *Dungeons & Dragons Third Edition*. Indeed it seems as if there are too many to count -- and the list keeps growing. Once it was not so, and there were only a few names that published for *AD&D 1st Edition* or the original *D&D* other than TSR, with even less producing material for the *2nd Edition*. Yet of those few, one stood head and shoulders above the rest -- for whatever reason -- and that was Judges Guild.

Long-time gamers may shake their heads ruefully and smile nostalgically when they consider the output of Judges Guild. Whatever game they were writing for, which for a time included supporting *D&D* without TSR's permission, their material could be best described as rough 'n' ready, or even cheap 'n' cheerful. At worst, it was dreadful dross, arguably not worth the paper it was printed on (which is not saying much, as Judges Guild always used the roughest of paper stock). Of course, some of their books captured the imagination, and many have achieved the status of desirable collectibles. Notable among these is *City-State of the Invincible Overlord*, but this was not Judges Guild's most popular and best-selling title. That honor fell to *Dark Tower*.

Originally released in 1979, *Dark Tower* has returned from the grave on the coattails of *Dungeons & Dragons Third Edition*, still from Judges Guild, but published through RPG Realms. The reason for its release is to actually update this adventure to the *Third Edition* rules and perhaps to even allow the long time gamer to replace their original and now worn copies with something more durable. Plus it also provides access to a slice of gaming history for the gamer relatively new to *D&D*.

[SPOILER ALERT!]

Paul Jaquays' dungeon begins along Redmoon Pass in the village of Mitra's Fist, home to a minor shrine dedicated to the Lawful Good deity, Mitra. In recent times, this shrine has gained a cursed reputation, which is not undeserved. Five centuries ago, the White Tower raised to Mitra was engaged in battle by the Dark Tower of his enemy, Set. After it ended, both towers had vanished and the original village was razed to the ground. Travelers have disappeared in Mitra's Fist and there is danger and mystery to be had in both the village and below it. Both towers are continuing their centuries-old feud, only now below ground. The adventure itself takes place inside both of these towers and the dungeon that has been dug between them. The feud between the clergies in each of the towers is left unexplored and if the referee wants to expand on this core thread they must do it themselves.

This adventure is designed for a party of six to ten characters of between seventh and eleventh levels. Their objective is to explore both dungeon and towers, before destroying the Dark Tower of Set. Alternatively, it would be possible to play this with a party of evil characters working to destroy both towers, or even as Set worshippers working to restore their god's tower. None of these ideas are considered in *Dark Tower*.

Physically this edition is a vast improvement over the original. The art is the virtual opposite of that of the 1979

version, and is taken straight out of a fantasy comic book. It is of a decent-enough standard, with Steve Bryant's work being the best of the three artists who illustrate *Dark Tower*. Unfortunately this style of art does not really mesh with the feel of the original writing. This was sparse, but combined with the green and black art of the original (also by Paul Jaquays) to give that book a brooding evil presence. Instead, the art in this new reprint is more chirpy than it is evil.

The book itself is a straight reprint of the original release with little or no change, including the original maps. Also included is a new appendix detailing every NPC in the adventure with their statistics updated to the *Third Edition* rules. The problem is that with two decades of hindsight under one's belt, the room descriptions read as rather sparse, and perhaps for today's audience they are *too* sparse. If the text could have done with a slight polish, then the maps certainly require reworking. Although generally easy to read, often stairs run into walls when it should have been made clear that they run to other levels. Further, the entrances to the dungeon and several of those between the levels could have been better marked.

A good job has been made of updating the characters to *Third Edition*. The problem is that there are a great many of them, all in an appendix at the rear of the book. Whilst some may see this as a good thing, perhaps it might have been better to place the statistics of those creatures who do not wander from their set location within that area's description, rather than at the back, thus making the wandering NPCs easy to locate and run from the appendix.

Like many dungeons of the period, *Dark Tower* is not an easy adventure to integrate into an ongoing campaign. The village of Mitra's Fist is off the beaten track, and not every world has an area analogous to the Middle Eastern or Egyptian setting that *Dark Tower* calls for. (One that springs readily to mind is the world of *Arcanis: The Shattered Empire* published by Paradigm Concepts.)

Another problem arises over Set's alignment. In *Dark Tower* it is given as Chaotic Evil, but new gamers may be confused if they have read Green Ronin Publishing's *Legions of Hell, Vol. 1* (backed up by the *Deities & Demigods* sourcebook), which intimates that the Egyptian god Set makes his home on the Fifth Circle of Hell. This would make him Lawful Evil, would it not? The explanation for this problem is not that Set or Mitra (or rather Mithras) are derived from our own history, but are instead taken from the world of Hyboria, the setting for Robert Howard's *Conan* stories. There Set is an evil snake good, rather than the jackal-headed god of the Egyptians, and Mitra the good god of the Northern peoples of Hyboria. DMs may need to be creative to order to resolve this difference.

(My thanks to Colin Speirs for setting my ignorance straight on this point. Conan must be read in penance.)

[END SPOILER ALERT]

This new version of *Dark Tower* makes no attempt to play up its modest place in gaming history. There is no mention that it is a reprint on the cover (nor what level or size of party is required to play it) and these details are only mentioned in the very short foreward. Where are the notes discussing the adventure's history or the original author's comments upon this new edition? Neither they nor anything similar are present, which is a shame, as they would have gone some way to explaining both the style and content of the original adventure to the modern gamer. Without them, *Dark Tower* feels like that special repackaged anniversary edition DVD you just bought, only to discover that having popped it into your player, it is totally lacking in both notes and special features.

Dark Tower still remains a classic *First Edition* dungeon, but with the statistics updated, of course. Yet the initial look and feel of the book promises something it is not -- a modern *d20 System* adventure. While the editor's intent to leave the original text as unaltered as possible is a laudable one, why not leave the original completely untouched, including the artwork and keeping the *Third Edition* information securely in an appendix? Or instead overhaul and update the original completely? The first option would please long time gamers, whilst the second would make the adventure far more accessible to new would-be fans. Instead, what we have is a halfway house that may displease long time fans and probably make this an inaccessible adventure to newer gamers.

Overall, this reprint is not going to help *Dark Tower's* reputation. It is a pity that the authors could not have been more inventive in the manner of WotC's recent release, *Return to the Temple of Elemental Evil*. While this remains a good dungeon at its heart, both Judges Guild and RPG Realms have missed some interesting opportunities with their first "new" book.

--*Matthew Pook*

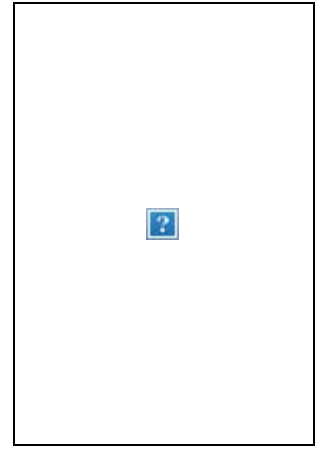
Pyramid Review

Gother Than Thou Card Game

Published by [Savant Garde Entertainment](#)

Designed by R. Hunter Gough

55 card standard set; \$9.95 U.S.



Much to their chagrin, it's not that hard to poke fun at the average goth.

There's just something about the tragic melodrama that they paint their world with that's so easy to make light of. Luckily, most goths have a sense of humor, and *Gother Than Thou* is the direct result of such humor. It's a simple and easy card game that pits players against each other to show who's the gothest of them all. It is dubbed "The most pretentious card game ever made," and in that regard it delivers with a chuckle.

The game runs for only ten bucks and comes with fifty-five cards, enough for three to five players. Game play is exceedingly simple (as the tiny rulebook will attest). Everyone in the game has three scores: Goth points, Sickness points, and Money points. Each card will increase or decrease one or more of these scores. Play goes in a circle, as players place one card from their hand into each person's fate pile, then discard one from their own. The objective is to get twenty goth points in your fate pile before anyone else does. Sickness points limit your maximum hand size, while Money points determine whether or not you're allowed the privilege of drawing from the discard pile (which can be pretty handy).

The strategy of the game is simple but fun. You want to play cards that keep your opponent's goth score low, while keeping yours high. The fact that everyone must discard one card from their fate pile each turn keeps it fluid, as well as do the effects of the various cards. Most games are pretty quick, as twenty points comes a lot faster than you'd think, so *Gother Than Thou* makes for a great pick-up game.

The real meat of this one, though, is in its parody of the prototypical goth scene. If you've ever hung out in a dark club, listening to Bauhaus and trying not to gag on the odor of clove cigarettes, then you know just what I mean. The goth scene is known for its pretentiousness, which can get downright silly when it runs too far. This game plays off of that, as everyone tries to pretentiously show just how goth they really are. Cards such as BlueBlack #124, Pet Named Hecate, and Disturbing German Accent are very goth and will put you on top quick. Cards such as Dire Fashion Blunder, Visit From Mom, and Disturbing Southern Accent are very *un*-goth and are definite no-nos. My favorite cards would have to be Genital Piercings (quite goth), Crying Yourself to Sleep* (also quite goth), and Sing This Corrosion to Me (which separates the true goths from the posers by making them recite lines from the quintessential Sisters of Mercy song). The game's designer definitely knows the scene being poked fun at, and if you do to, then the cards are a good laugh.

*(*On the fresh grave of your lifelong love who died of consumption and being found the next morning unconscious, naked, and nearly frozen to death by the groundskeeper)*

The cards use black and white photography to illustrate all of the gothic silliness and bring the game to life pretty well. Some minor Photoshop effects are used here and there, but for the most part the presentation is pretty simple. It's nowhere near as lustrous as a Wizards of the Coast production, but it's definitely goth enough to get the job done.

If there's a qualm with the game, it would have to be a lack of cards. The game comes with fifty-five cards, but many of these are repeats (there are 24 individual cards). This limits the extended game play a bit, as the game can get boring before too long. It's hard to say if an expansion set or expanded edition will be created, but more cards could

certainly be used.

Overall though, the game is good fun for ten bucks. If you're into the goth scene, then ***Gother Than Thou*** makes light of some things you're sure to find amusing. If you're not into the goth scene, then it will have less appeal, but the simple but effective strategy of the game still makes it interesting enough.

--*Jon Thompson*

Pyramid Review

Rebellion Era Sourcebook (for the Star Wars RPG)

Published by [Wizards of the Coast](#)

Designed by **Bill Slavicsek, Steve Miller, and Owen K.C. Stephens**

Illustrated by **Drew Struzan, D. Alexander Gregory, Adi Granov, Joe Corroney, Randy Post, Lee Bermejo, Lucasfilm Ltd.**

Edited by **Bill Slavicsek**

160 color page hardcover; \$29.95

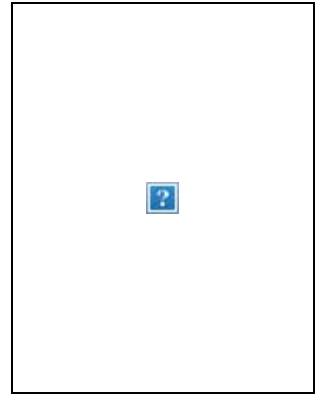
The Rebellion Era Sourcebook is the much-awaited sourcebook detailing the classic setting for Wizards of the Coast's *Star Wars Roleplaying Game*. While the book bears little similarity to the description given on the Wizards of the Coast Web site, it is still a fabulous resource for those wanting to play in the setting originally portrayed in the movies.

The book breaks down the Rebellion Era into five chapters: one for each of the movies in the core trilogy, as well as a chapter for each of the spaces between movies. Each of the chapters covering movies provide updated statistics for the characters in terms of where they are in the timeline. Interspersed throughout the book are examples of how to use these various elements in an ongoing campaign with the intention being that the players can roughly parallel the course of the movies. The information is presented in the form of a series of essays, each essay covering an aspect of the timeline.

For example Chapter One: A New Hope contains sections on "The End of the Senate," "The Death Star: An Overview," and "Defenders of the Alliance: X-Wing Pilots." Also, in addition to describing the details presented in the movies, it provides a good deal of background material that is compiled from various sources in what Lucasfilm calls the Expanded Universe. These articles cover everything from the history of the Republic's fall and the Empire's birth to a contrast of the corporations behind the X-Wing and the TIE Fighter.

The other chapters are:

- Chapter Two: A Dark Time, which covers the period between Episodes IV and V. This chapter focuses much more on the background of the setting than others, covering such topics as Imperial Intelligence, the Corporate Sector, and the Spice Mines of Kessel. A lot of information from books and the previous RPG from West End Games appears here.
- Chapter Three: The Empire Strikes Back, which mostly focuses on the events, places and personalities of the movie, with the notable exception being the articles on the Dark Troopers from the Dark Forces video game.
- Chapter Four: Shadows of the Empire describes events between Episodes V and VI, with the obvious emphasis being on the book of the same name. Bothans, Coruscant and the Dark Sun Crime Syndicate all have varying degrees of coverage in this section.
- Chapter Five: Return of the Jedi highlights not just topics related to the movie, but touches lightly on the novels Truce at Bakura and The Courtship of Princess Leia, as well as the trilogy written by Timothy Zahn.



Overall, this is a great sourcebook. Information is just oozing out of the pores. I've always been a big proponent of information over numbers, and this book is just that. I'm particularly pleased by the inclusion of things I wouldn't otherwise have expected, such as the history that takes place between the prequels and the core trilogy, the expanded information on stormtroopers, and the inclusion of some relatively obscure items from the Expanded Universe. So what's the downside?

The first frustration that you're going to get is that it doesn't quite jibe up with the description they have on their Web site. Specifically, they advertise weapon and ship statistics, citing specifically the Death Stars and the TIE Interceptors. These statistics do not exist in the book. In fact, there are very little vehicle descriptions in the book. They specifically refuse to give statistics for the Death Star, arguing that it's just too big and scary to really warrant statistics. Barring a plot device like a ventilation shaft, you will lose. The vehicles they present are a couple of starships in the sidebars provided for campaign ideas, a reprint of the AT-AT statistics from the Core Rules, Boba Fett's Slave I, a reprint from *Star Wars Gamer* magazine of a custom Star Destroyer of one of the Emperor's Hands, the personal ship of Guri from *Shadows of the Empire*, and the Ewok glider. There are statistics for swoop riders, but no swoops. There are TIE Fighter pilots, but no TIE Interceptor. Not much in the way of weapons, either, but I'll leave it at that.

Also, the general feel of the book is kind of heterogeneous. It generally follows the plot of the movies, but that's about the only organization method. In the chapter on *The Empire Strikes Back* you go from information about the various fighting forces on Hoth, to bounty hunters, to a commentary on Imperial trash dumping and the races that prey on said trash. From there it goes to the previously mentioned Dark Troopers, and then to Dagobah. This wouldn't be as bad if there was an index. But there's no index. Want to find information on Leia's friend Winter? I think she was first mentioned in the Zahn books, which would mean that she'd be in those last pages of Chapter Five: The Return of the Jedi. But no, she seems to be in Chapter Two in a section called "Rebel Procurement Specialists." I apparently don't know enough about Winter in order to find more information about her.

And, on a more personal gripe: I wish I knew where some of this information was from. Sure, I can identify the Charon as being from the West End Games adventure *Otherspace*. Though I haven't read *Splinter in the Mind's Eye*, I'm pretty sure the Kaiburr Crystal is from that book. But I have little clue where the Prophets of the Dark Side are from, and even less idea where the Kilian Rangers, a type of Force Adept, are from. I can't even find Kilian Rangers on the Internet. In fact, since they are described in a four-page sidebar between essays on starfighter manufacturers and starfighter pilots, it doesn't qualify as an essay, and as such is not even listed in the table of contents.

So, long story short: This is a great sourcebook with a lot of information, it just has some rough edges. If you want an encyclopedic reference on the Rebellion Era, this isn't it. If you want a ton of new toys to play with, this isn't it. If you want a book filled with lots of interesting background information, then this is for you. It's a fabulous sourcebook . . . just not what you might expect it to be.

--Jeremy Jacob Zimmerman

Conditional Love

I think I may have found a new neat GMing toy:

The conditional.

It's an idea that most folks are *more* than familiar in the Real World:

- We'll give you a promotion and a raise, **if** you take on more responsibilities at work.
- We'll give you your own car in high school, **if** you schlep your younger brother around.
- You can buy *Godfather* and *Godfather II* on DVD, **if** you're willing to purchase *Godfather III* at the same time.

Anyway, conditional rewards and incentives are something I've understood intuitively for a while, and used time to time in campaigns past. For example, in my *Aberrant* campaign I gave the heroes a Chicago city block to play with . . . provided that they stayed in the city and protected it. And during a *Fading Suns* game I got the heroes to accept aid from the enigmatic mysterious Vao under the condition that they sign a contract . . . which simply stated that they had, indeed, received aid from the Vao. (I'd intended for it to be simply a concrete example of the alien nature of their helpers. But *wow* were the players paranoid about signing it . . . which made me consider the possibilities afterwards . . .)

But I only put the pieces together last week, when the cash-strapped adventurers were looking to buy a ship to begin trading in the wide-open seas of *Exalted*. Well, they rolled well enough to get *something*, but I didn't want to give them their own vessel free and clear. So I let them have a faster-than-normal experimental ship, with a few . . . minor conditions:

- They had it for a three-year lease. If it was destroyed, or otherwise didn't return, then they (and their co-signing contacts and mentors) would be responsible for the ship.
- The captain needed to keep notes on its performance. It's an experimental ship -- one with which the shipwright hopes to build his reputation -- and he needs reports to know how it did.
- And they needed to bring along as part of the crew -- and keep an eye on -- the shipwright's bookish son, Chasper ([first words](#): "Our captain's going to be a *woman?!?*"). The "boy" has some issues to work out, and he needs to learn how to work on a boat.

(I had to make all of this up on the fly; my players, typically, forged their own destinies entirely away from any plot points I may have had planned for them.)

Anyway, in my mind this immediately creates a win-win situation for the heroes, players, and GM. The players and heroes got their boat, and I now have plenty of plot hooks to spice up future games.

And, ultimately, I believe that should be the purpose of the in-game conditional item. If it doesn't add to the story, or provide some interesting twist that everyone will enjoy (and is logical), I can't think of a reason to add a condition. Thus having a mentor millionaire NPC loan the heroes his Aston Martin with the condition that it comes back in pristine shape makes perfect sense; having that mentor loan the car with the requirement the heroes don't engage in any combat probably doesn't. (Of course, you may realize that the former almost necessitates the latter . . . but at least then the players aren't being clubbed over the head with an illogical requirement.)

Anyway, here are some ideas for conditional rewards, most of which I've used in the past but have never codified before now:

- **"Bring it back in one piece!"** -- Though it's obvious, most things that contacts loan the heroes will probably need to be returned in good condition, which leads to plot possibilities when the stuff gets put in danger. For a clever twist, have the condition be that the property *can't* return, and needs to be entirely eliminated. Maybe the underground weaponry has some cases tied to it, and it needs to be destroyed as evidence. Or maybe the NPC's

ex-spouse is suing for divorce and will get the Porsche unless the heroes "accidentally" destroy it in the course of saving the world. (As a general rule, if you tell players that they *have* to destroy something, they will usually do such with a gleeful abandon.)

- **Trade for a future player to be named later** -- Have the heroes get what they need up front, with the understanding that they will be expected to fulfill some unspecified request in the future. Depending on who they need to make the deal with, this can *really* make the heroes squirm. Fairly recently in the *Superman* comic, for example, Lois made a Faustian deal with Lex Luthor to have him restore the Daily Planet after it had been closed down, with the condition that he can -- at any time -- call upon her to bury any one story he chooses. He still hasn't made use of this boon, but it lurks in the background as something he *could* do . . .
- **"I was planning on doing that, anyway . . ."** -- You can give the heroes, as a condition, something they were going to do anyway. For example, the party might be given some weaponry by someone victimized by organized crime, under the condition that they kill a certain crime boss (perhaps the boss killed a loved one, and he wants revenge). There's a real chance the heroes might do that anyway. If you're looking for a cruel conundrum, what if the good guys get to the end and learn they *can't* kill the bad guy? Perhaps he's actually innocent of the crime the heroes are hunting him for, and/or he's needed to testify against someone bigger and badder.
- **"Actually, if you could do me a tiny favor . . ."** -- Depending on the genre, one of the most fun things is to take a little task, and have it spiral out of control. Thus the heroes might get *exactly* what they need, provided they can return a library book before it closes. Well, they get to the library, and it's under attack by bad guys! And the library's on fire! For a twist, you can have the "adventure" the heroes were planning for be entirely straightforward ("With the gear you got from Mrs. O'Flannery, you easily break into the vault. The crime boss is caught completely unaware, and surrenders immediately."), with the *real* adventure be the misadventures that result from fulfilling an early favor.

Of course, as I said earlier, the purpose of a conditional reward is to provide more (and different) opportunities for roleplaying, adventure, and fun. It *isn't* to straightjacket your players into situations they're unhappy with. So long as everyone remembers that, conditions can be a great spice in a meaty adventure.

And if the players complain about a certain condition, tell them you're more than willing to get rid of it . . . if they do one *tiny* favor . . .

--*Steven Marsh*

* * *

*Last week's answer: **Delta Green**, pp. 10-11.*

(Two stars) "The most recent of these reappearances occurred only a few years past, just prior to the great wars that engulfed the Flanaess, when both the *Eye* and *Hand* fell into the clutches of the cult."

The Rats' Revenge: Part I

An adventure for *In Nomine*

by Jo Ramsay

Overview

This *In Nomine* scenario is designed for a group of angelic PCs. The first part is based on Earth, and could be in any city. Characters are asked to investigate a nasty locked room murder, which was indirectly caused by a missing ethereal envoy. A Renegade Shedite of Nightmares is also hiding in a local mental institution, closely followed by the demons from Hell's secret police who are hunting it. Ethereal envoys are here too, searching for the faerie rat and its all-important message -- a message that could provoke a war between two of the most powerful Demon Princes in Hell.

Scenario Layout

This write-up has been divided into two sections. In this part, the plot hook is introduced, as are the main locations PCs will check out while investigating, with the NPCs they find there. The plot hook involves two scenes that are effectively fixed, and then the investigation becomes free-ranging, depending on what PCs want to do.

In the second part, the mystery is explained and the final piece of the investigation on Earth is put into place. Superiors' reactions (whether PCs find the missing message or not) lead to a desperate trek into the Far Marches . . .

Part I: Peace on Earth

Scene 1: "I Suppose You're Wondering Why I Called You All Here Today ... "

Purpose: PCs are briefed, and introduced to their celestial contact (**Luria**; stats follow scene).

Characters are called shortly after dawn by one of their usual celestial contacts (or a local Seneschal if they are new to the area) and invited to a local cafe. The tone of the invitation is unmistakably urgent. When they arrive, their contact is sitting stiffly at a quiet table with a full cup of coffee in front of him, accompanied by a tall Indian man who PCs do not recognize. As they sit down, the Indian is introduced as Dr. Lal, the mortal vessel of Luria -- a Seraph of Judgment. The soft-voiced Seraph asks each character in turn for personal details (name, Role, local address, and whether they are currently dissonant or Discordant), but shows no interest in the answers unless anyone attempts to lie to him. With no more ado, the PCs' contact clears his throat and begins the briefing.

Two days ago, a loud disturbance in the Symphony was heard coming from a run-down area on the outskirts of town. It was reported on a CB radio in code phrases by an itinerant Ofanite of the Wind as she was on her way out of town at high speed, and it has taken local angels this much time to locate someone who could decipher the code. The time and place of the disturbance match closely with an unusual murder case that police are currently investigating. PCs are given the name of Alex Constantinides, a Soldier of Stone who is a junior detective in the local police force, and asked to get the details of the case from him before going to check out the murder location. They should be looking for any signs of celestial involvement, and reporting back daily to the Seraph, who will base himself at a local Tether.

If any unfortunate individual attempts to eat or drink anything during the briefing, Luria warns him coolly of the dangers to angels of being tempted by corporeal pleasures of the flesh (such as over-brewed coffee and rock hard muffins).

LURIA

Seraph of Judgment

Corporeal Forces - 3 Strength 7 Agility 5
Ethereal Forces - 3 Intelligence 9 Precision 3
Celestial Forces - 4 Will 8 Perception 8

Vessel: Male/3

Role: "Dr. Deepak Lal," Pathologist/4, Status/3

Skills: Dodge/1, Medicine/3, Move Silently/1, Tactics/2, Knowledge (Cryptography/4, Criminology/5)

Songs: Acid/3, Charm (Celestial/3), Healing (Corporeal/4, Ethereal/3)

Attunements: Seraph of Judgment

Luria dislikes the corporeal realm, preferring the rarified atmosphere of Heaven where he can serve God without getting his wings dirty. His last trip to Earth was in the late 1880s, and he isn't terribly pleased about being back now. Signs of unangelic behavior in angels worry him, and he will inform culprits of their misdemeanors in exacting detail. He is also a dreadful snob and considers interacting with anything corporeal to be a lowering of his personal standards.

However much he hates this job, Luria would rather walk over broken glass than disappoint his terrifying Superior. If he is asked to help interrogate any NPCs, using his resonance to determine whether they are speaking the truth, PCs will have to collect him. He isn't up to speed with such modern devices as cars or telephones, which is why he requested the modern angels to do his leg work.

Scene 2: "You Say We Have Mutual Friends in *High Places*?"

Purpose: PCs get the low down on the murder, and leads into two locations: the murder scene (Paradise Towers) and the mental hospital (Pleasant Meadow.) Also leads to suspects/witnesses -- **Ivy** (see Pleasant Meadow, below) and **Lucy/Amy** (see Part II).

At the police station, Alex Constantinides is expecting a visit from some angels but has not been given their names or descriptions. Once PCs have convinced him of their credentials, he gives them as much help as he can. The murder occurred in a basement apartment of Paradise Towers, an aging tenement block in a run-down part of town. A man, identified as "Eddie Jackson," was killed two nights ago, at midnight. The man was killed in his bed, although the bedroom door was bolted shut from the inside when he was found. The body was found in a ruined state, as if all of the fleshy parts had been gnawed away. Even stranger, the body was tied securely to the bed at the wrists and ankles with different cables. Death was due to extreme trauma -- although a pillow was found over the corpse's face, he was mutilated while still alive . . .

When police broke the bedroom door down, they found the dead man's wife, Ivy, tied to the bed next to the body, unharmed. She was splattered with blood and gore, and (unsurprisingly) unable to give a coherent statement. She has been admitted to Pleasant Meadow, a local mental hospital, where her current state is said to be "not great." Alex can arrange for characters to see her, if they wish.

One other thing the policeman can tell PCs is that the Jacksons were a family with problems. Eddie owed money to various creditors, and had been in trouble previously for beating his two daughters, Lucy (8) and Amy (3). In fact, the social services had taken the girls into care less than a week ago and they are currently in a childrens' home. Constantinides passes the PCs a large envelope with pictures of the murder scene inside it. They show Eddie's gnawed remains, as described. The detective also explains that there is going to be a press briefing at noon, so it would be a good idea if they went over to the tenement before reporters get hold of the story. He is glad to have celestial backup, and strongly suspects supernatural involvement in this case.

Paradise Towers Tenement Block -- The Murder Scene

Interesting facts: Paradise Towers is a micro-tether into the Far Marches, a place where very small ethereals (in terms of Forces) can sneak through into the corporeal realm. This is not automatically detectable by celestials. The murder was committed by ethereal faerie rats (see Part II).

Purpose: PCs may find clues pointing to the rats not being what they seem. Also pointers to the school and pest control.

NPCs here: Characters will meet **John de Groote** (stats follow Paradise Towers), the Fortean investigator. They may also encounter **Reed**, a faerie noble who has been sent to Earth with a posse of ethereal **Hobgoblin** troublemakers (stats follow Paradise Towers) to track down a missing faerie rat messenger.

Description of surrounding area: The area is run down, and the air is thick with heat, dust, and the frustration of the poverty trap. The Paradise Towers tenement is a redbrick with high ceilings and thick walls. It was built in the Victorian era, and then renovated in the 1950s. Graffiti covers the brickwork, a mixture of declarations of love, misspelled political slogans, and anarchy symbols. There are also a couple of slogans in the lobby, sprayed on by hobgoblins, that read "Die, motherf**** mortals!" and "Beleth sucks!"

What local human residents know: Many have been tortured in their nightmares by playful hobgoblins. They may remember having vivid dreams (not nightmares) about rats since living in the tenement block.

The Jackson's Basement Apartment: The basement apartment can be reached by creaking elevator or creaking stairs. Examination of the lock shows scratch marks around the barrel, as if it had been picked. The police have already searched the apartment, and taken the sheets from the main bed as evidence.

Junk mail on the doormat includes final demands, an invoice from Kill-Em-All pest control, and an invitation to Mrs. Ivy Jackson to attend a parents' evening at a local school (see: following the trail). One bedroom (the girls' room) has bolts on the outside but is bare inside apart from two beds, a wardrobe, and an empty hamster cage. The main bedroom is a mess, and there is a bolt on the inside of the door. If PCs head for the apartment directly after speaking to the policeman, they will find de Groote (see below) checking over his equipment in here.

Faeries on the way out: Four mean-eyed black cats watch PCs as they leave the tenement. If characters have made any disturbance or shown interest in the hobgoblin graffiti, the creatures (four hobgoblins in feline vessels) will trail them. The hobgoblins scare their victims with illusions, and then attack as a group. If badly injured they will try to flee. Reed himself may show up to find out what his charges have been getting up to. In any case, he will be at Paradise Towers that night to interrogate faerie rats.

<sniff> *I smell a rat!* The faerie rats will not make themselves known until after dusk. One by one, they slip into the apartment in search of interesting cables, or toys to mend. PCs who wait up in search of rats may see or catch one of the creatures during the night. They are identical to normal rats, except for the cream

Running an Investigation in *In Nomine*

In *Nomine* poses a challenge to GMs who wish to run investigative scenarios. Angelic PCs have abilities that let them easily extract information from NPCs, often without needing to ask any questions. Demonic PCs are just as likely to make up a good solution and then use their own abilities to force the NPCs into line. NPCs won't get away with telling lies or any other kind of deceit, if there is a Seraph in the party. Double crosses can't be assumed to work, and even the souls of the dead can be interrogated if they wound up in the celestial realm that the PCs call home.

Investigations work best when PCs are given free range to use their abilities. Assume they will get to the bottom of any investigation quickly, and balance the scenario out by letting it be insufficient to merely discover the truth. Angels and demons should always have to act on the information they receive. Angels should be motivated to do the Right Thing, and demons to do the Wrong Thing. There should be a constant tension between the miraculous superpowers that the PCs have, and the need to avoid making disturbance that would draw the attention of the Other Side.

colored fur with red-tinged muzzle (stats in Part II.) If interrogated, they are gentle and playful, but not clever. They all remember taking revenge on the Jacksons because one of their number summoned the rest.

JOHN DE GROOTE

Human Fortean Investigator

Corporeal Forces - 1 Strength 2 Agility 2
Ethereal Forces - 2 Intelligence 5 Precision 3
Celestial Forces - 2 Will 4 Perception 4

Skills: Computer Operation/4, Drive/1, Escape/1, Fast Talk/2, Knowledge (Occult/4), Lockpicking/3, Move Silently/1

De Groote made enough money from dabbling in real estate to be able to retire at the age of 35 and devote all his time to his true interest, investigating strange parapsychic phenomena. He has made a name for himself in the parapsychic community and is a popular speaker at Fortean Conventions, where he discusses ghosts and spirits, and the results of his investigations.

One of the policemen in the local precinct shares an interest in psychic phenomena, and called de Groote after the body was recovered from Paradise Towers to ask his opinion. The investigator immediately packed up, and arrived the next day. He intends to see whether the murder location is haunted, so set up special camera equipment to be left running overnight.

When the investigator returned to check the results, he found that some cables were missing. He intends to get to the bottom of this, if nothing else. John is very confident, freely offering his advice and opinions on every subject under the sun. He believes that the spirit of his dead sister watches over him and that ghosts often intercede in the mortal world. Although he is a man of science, he would love to prove the existence of the supernatural beyond any shadow of a doubt.

If other obviously supernatural events happen in the town, de Groote will be on the spot quickly, claiming to be an noted expert, and demanding that everyone lets him through. His contact in the police keeps him posted.

REED

Faerie Noble (Seelie)

Corporeal Forces - 2 Strength 3 Agility 5
Ethereal Forces - 3 Intelligence 6 Precision 6
Celestial Forces - 2 Will 4 Perception 4

Vessel: Male/2 (Charisma +3)

Role: "Reed," Freelance Journalist/2, Status/2

Skills: Artistry/3 (Dancing), Drive/4 (fast bikes), Dodge/2, Fast Talk/5, Large Weapon/3 (Sword), Seduction/4

Songs: Dreams (Corporeal/2, Celestial/2), Healing (Ethereal/4), Light (Ethereal/4)

Reed has been sent to Earth to find the missing faerie rat quickly, before either Heaven or Hell have a chance to intercept it. He is the sole NPC who knows of the missing message, and its topic. He was sent as tribute to Beleth from the Seelie Court after a failed assassination attempt on the Seelie Queen, and slavery has soured his once carefree disposition. A pack of hobgoblins was also assigned to help with the hunt, and Reed is nominally in charge of them. Two have not yet reported back (they have been captured by Sedek, and are being held at the mental hospital). He cares nothing for humanity except for the Essence he can win from them through charm and seduction. He does make

exceptions for those who do him favors, and falls in and out of love as easily and randomly as most people switch TV channels.

Reed affects biking leathers and a witty manner, and rides a yellow Ducati that he refers to as "my noble steed." He wants to avoid running into either angels or demons (but mostly demons), and for the hobgoblins to just behave.

HOBGOBLINS

Ethereal spirits

Corporeal Forces - 1	Strength 2	Agility 2
Ethereal Forces - 2	Intelligence 3	Precision 5
Celestial Forces - 2	Will 3	Perception 5

Vessel(s): Various. Some have animal vessels (cats, dogs, pigeons) and others have human vessels.

Skills: Dodge/2, Fighting/3, Move Silently/3, Small Weapon/2 (Knife)

Songs: Fangs/3, Dreams (Corporeal/4, Celestial/2), Light (Ethereal/3)

Thirteen hobgoblins were sent to help Reed track down the missing rat. They have notified the faerie noble of ethereal activity in Paradise Towers, and four of them (in cat vessels) are staking the tenement out. A few more are amusing themselves by terrifying and interrogating the dreamscapes of hapless local residents. No rats have yet been caught.

Other hobgoblins are investigating other disturbances, or have wandered off to intimidate random mortals. They are too stupid to be **quiet** on Earth or in the Near Marches, which is how Sedek surprised and captured two of them.

Hobgoblins play with their human prey and stalk victims, preferring vulnerable types such as children, old people, and teens with overactive imaginations. They also enjoy watching slasher flicks en masse, cheering as each victim is gutted on screen.

Following the Trail

Kill-Em-All pest control: The company has been called out to Paradise Towers several times over the last ten years. No rats have ever been found or destroyed. They went to the Jacksons' apartment recently to lay down poison, with the usual non-result. The pest control operative knows that Mrs. Jackson was paranoid about rats, and claimed that she could hear them scrabbling in the walls at night.

Local School: Teachers at the local school remember Lucy Jackson as an intense, introverted child. Her class teacher is a believer in "letting children work out their own problems," and was stunned to hear that the Jackson girls had been taken into care. Lucy had very few close friends, but the girls she hung out with know about her new pet rat (see Part II), if PCs go to look for them. They also know she hated her father.

Pleasant Meadow Mental Hospital

Interesting Facts: The hospital is a base of operations for Beleth's demons in the area. Under Sedek's influence, it is becoming a place of living nightmares for patients and staff.

Purpose: PCs meet Ivy, getting more pointers towards the girls and rats. They may discover Sedek and fight him, or become involved in Jasper & Djon's hunt for the missing Shedite.

NPCs here: **Sedek**, the Calabite of nightmares, who has two hobgoblins tied up in his private chamber. **Jasper** and **Djon**, the heavy-handed demonic inquisitors who are searching for **Beautiful Scream Vexation**, a Shedite who has fled Hell for what she fondly thinks of as love.

Description: Pleasant Meadow is a specialist psychiatric hospital. Tall brick walls topped with broken glass surround the institution and signs warn visitors to stay within marked areas and to turn off mobile phones. The hospital has three main wings. The first wing, where the reception is located, is for outpatients. The second wing is for residential patients, and the third wing is a secure area, for residential patients with violent or antisocial tendencies.

Doctors and consultants have offices on the second floor of the outpatients' wing, and the two kidnapped hobgoblins are being kept in the secure wing.

The hospital is an uncomfortable place. Since Sedek took up residence, it has become violent and depressing. Suicides among patients have increased, and they are all nervous of the staff. Drug use is widespread, and rumors of rapes and beatings inflicted on patients are rife. Incidences of patient assaults on staff have increased also. Also, many people have suffered violent nightmares, an inevitable result of two Demons of Nightmares being in the institution.

Meeting Ivy

If Alex (the policeman) has made arrangements, the receptionist shows PCs to the residential wing and introduces them to a burly staff nurse who takes them to Ivy Jackson's room.

Ivy is doped up to the eyeballs when PCs see her. She sits on the end of a bed, hugging herself and swaying. If encouraged to think back to the night of the murder, she talks about rats. She claims that she can hear them here too sometimes, scrabbling between the walls. Eventually she bursts into tears.

The nurse who escorts PCs into the room knows that Dr. Foster forced Ivy to handle a rat when she was admitted to the hospital. She wouldn't stop screaming, so they sedated her. Ivy has little to say about her daughters, except to burst into wailing, pained tears if the subject is raised.

Other Encounters

1. Jasper and Djon have been staking the building out in search of their Renegade Shedite. If they encounter PCs acting in a suspicious manner, they will harass them relentlessly.
2. PCs may encounter Beautiful Scream (the Renegade Shedite), either in a staff or patient host. In either case, she attempts to drive her hosts to damnation and impress Sedek by her dedication to the cause.
3. Reed is trying to fast-talk his way in, to talk with Ivy. If Sedek notices him first, the faerie noble may find himself on his way to the torture chamber . . .

Other NPCs at Pleasant Meadow (a sample of staff and patients at the hospital)

Patients

Benny is a hulking giant of a man who is now in the high security wing of the hospital. He has a sweet smile, and an infantile, psychotic mind. Benny is subject to brief bouts of uncontrollable rage and violence. He is terrified of Sedek and cowers in a corner at the sound of Dr. Foster's name.

Annalise wanders around the in-patients wing of the hospital, leaning on a stick. She accosts visitors and accuses them of being part of the conspiracy. She mutters dire warnings about medical misconduct, rapes, and beatings, and the doctor's secret torture chamber in the high security wing. If a nurse is called to take her back to her ward, Annalise shrieks, flails around, and claims that she is being persecuted because she knows about The Plan.

Sarah is a friendly old lady who attends out-patients clinics. She listens with interest to anyone's personal problems, but occasionally lapses into long silent fugues where she stares blindly into the middle distance. If anyone asks her a question, she politely informs them that she will have to consult the Rabbi. The rabbi, she explains, is very wise but

difficult to contact . . . because he is dead and buried in her local graveyard.

Staff

Maria is a big psychiatric nurse. Her English is broken, and she takes out her frustration on the patients when they don't understand her. She is always polite to visitors though -- Dr. Foster says that is important, and she is in terrified awe of him.

Terri, one of the senior nurses on the non-secure wing, is a small woman who is very conscientious about her charges. She has recently returned from holiday and is startled by the increasing rumors of brutality on the wards.

Dr. Arran, one of the junior psychiatrists, enjoys the feeling of superiority he has over his patients, and is quick to dole out medication that will make his life easier by keeping the patients quiet. He is also not above administering date-rape drugs to patients or staff and taking full advantage of them. He lies like a rug if asked difficult questions.

SEDEK

Calabite Captain of Nightmares

Corporeal Forces - 3	Strength 7	Agility 5
Ethereal Forces - 4	Intelligence 8	Precision 8
Celestial Forces - 4	Will 10	Perception 6

Vessel: Male/3

Role: "Mr. Steven Foster," Senior Consultant at Pleasant Meadow/4, Status/4

Skills: Detect Lie/1, Dodge/3, Emote/1, Fast Talk/4, Fighting/4, Knowledge/5 (Psychiatry), Large Weapon/4 (Axe), Medicine/3

Songs: Dreams (All/4), Entropy (Ethereal/5), Shields (Corporeal/3, Celestial/3)

Discord: Phlegm/3 (This is a Corporeal Discord, described below)

Attunements: Calabite of Nightmares, Dreamwalking, Captain of Headhaunters

The demon in his mortal form is a small man who wears old, stained raincoats and faded sneakers. His particular Discord takes the form of constant retching into a seemingly endless supply of tissues. He explains this to mortals as the result of a former 50-a-day smoking habit. He has an oily, ingratiating manner and rubs his hands together when he is excited.

Sedek is a Destroyer, and he loves to destroy people's self-confidence and sanity. He is an expert in psychological torture, but is not averse to experimenting with physical torture if he gets the chance. If he gets nervous, his first instinct is to attack whoever is threatening him. He will initially try to do this with psychological attacks, playing on the other party's weaknesses and fears.

Sedek currently has no idea that Beautiful Scream (the Renegade Shedite) is on Earth, much less that she is in his hospital. However, he dislikes the Asmodeans enough that he will help her to avoid them if she does make herself known.

He has noticed an increase in ethereal activity in the town over the last couple of days. In fact, he captured a couple of hobgoblins a night ago, and has imprisoned them in a secure room in the hospital. He knows they had no permission to be on Earth, and is planning to amuse himself by torturing the creatures to death slowly. If he knew about the faerie rats, his approach would be to bite their heads off, spitting the pieces out while the little whiskers were still twitching. He has not yet had time to talk to Ivy; torturing hobgoblins can eat up so much of a demon's time ...

BEAUTIFUL SCREAM VEXATION (BSV)

Renegade Shedite of Nightmares

Corporeal Forces - 1 Strength 2 Agility 2
Ethereal Forces - 2 Intelligence 4 Precision 4
Celestial Forces - 4 Will 11 Perception 5

Skills: Acrobatics/2, Dodge/3, Lying/3, Running/1

Songs: Dreams (All/4)

Attunements: Shedite of Nightmares

Dissonance: 2 notes

Beautiful Scream is a young Shedite who is absolutely **not** authorized to be on Earth. The breaking point came for BSV when she was playing an innocent demonic childhood game of "freak out the dreamer" and was ambushed by Malakim of Blandine inside a dreamscape. The angels grabbed one tentacle apiece and dragged her away for a fatal beating. She screamed but no aid came . . . until a black-browed Calabite with murder in his eyes surprised her tormentors. His name was Sedek, and he was hunting ethereals, and because he was the first demon BSV had ever met who didn't abuse her horribly, she fell utterly in love.

She has since sneaked down a Tether and came to the mental hospital to be with her beloved. She began her campaign to claim his attention by possessing local mortals and driving them slowly insane -- insane enough to be admitted into Pleasant Meadow. The next stage is to prove her love for Sedek by helping him to turn the hospital into Hell on Earth. She does this by possessing either a patient or staff member, and riding them into violent self-destructive oblivion, but never in a way that would directly attach any blame to the object of her affections. Maybe one day she will actually dare to introduce herself to him properly.

BSV has two notes of dissonance, incurred through her inexperience in corrupting mortals. Technically she is a Renegade, but Beautiful Scream is not trying to run away from Hell. She may have a hard time explaining this to the demons of the Game who are hot on her tail.

JASPER

Balseraph of the Game

Corporeal Forces - 3 Strength 6 Agility 6
Ethereal Forces - 2 Intelligence 3 Precision 6
Celestial Forces - 4 Will 10 Perception 6

Vessel: Male (mid-thirties)/4 (Charisma +1)

Role: "Jasper James," FBI Agent/4, Status/3

Skills: Drive/3, Emote/3, Fast Talk/3, Ranged Weapon/4 (Pistol), Wave Gun Around in an Intimidating Manner/5 (based on Will, default -1)

Songs: Charm (Corporeal/4), Possession/3

Artefact: Unholy Pistol (6 bullets)

Attunements: Balseraph of the Game

Jasper and Djon are partners, sent to the area to investigate rumors of a Renegade of Nightmares. This is unfortunate for all other demons in the area, particularly Sedek. The pair began to investigate the strange murder in Paradise Towers, but as soon as they found out that Pleasant Meadow was involved, they concentrated their investigation there instead. The Calabite is co-operating, but has made it clear he resents their presence and that his Mistress will be disappointed if his work is interrupted.

Jasper is an ambitious type. This is his second tour of Earth duty, and he is genuinely enthusiastic about the advantages that devotion to the Lords of the Pit can bring to both celestial and mortal. In short, he is a thorough "company man." Jasper uses the authority of his FBI Role to steamroller the local police, which does not endear him to them. If the pair encounter PCs, Jasper waxes lyrical about why Hell is morally superior to Heaven. He also attempts to persuade PCs that it is in their best interests to help search for the suspected Renegade.

DJON

Djinn of the Game

Corporeal Forces - 3	Strength 6	Agility 6
Ethereal Forces - 4	Intelligence 8	Precision 8
Celestial Forces - 4	Will 8	Perception 9

Vessels: Male /5 (Charisma -1), Female (mid-twenties)/2

Role: "Jane Segawa," FBI Agent/3, Status/3

Skills: Artistry/3 (Opera), Detect Lie/1, Dodge/3, Emote/2, Fighting/5, Move Silently/4, Small Weapon/3 (Knife)

Songs: Attraction (Ethereal/5), Claws/3, Thunder/4

Attunements: Djinn of the Game, Dissonance Binding

Djon is an old hand at identifying and capturing demons that fail in their duty. The work has taken its toll on him, and left him a sulking, paranoid demon who is convinced that the world is out to get him personally. He currently has two vessels -- a young black female with buck teeth, and a hulking white male vessel with multiple tattoos that he uses for wet work. He likes to listen to grand opera, which will be playing loudly on the stereo of the pair's car if PCs encounter it.

As Jane Segawa, the demon pouts sulkily and lets her partner do most of the talking. Djon prefers to correct Jasper in private if he does anything particularly stupid, but has been known to slap him across the face and storm off if provoked. When confronting the enemy, it is Djon who will hiss, "Stop jabbering and shoot them, you idiot!"

Centuries of experience and a general dislike of Calabim have convinced him that the Renegade exists, is in league with Sedek, and is hiding out at Pleasant Meadow. All he has to do is find the creature, and nail the damned Destroyer for collaboration with intent!

* * *

(Check out next week's issue for Part II.)

Brendan the Bold

*"We sailed every ocean, we sailed every sea,
We sailed every spot that a sailor could be.
In forty-four days we sailed ten million miles,
We sailed for Saint Brendan's fair isle, fair isle,
We sailed for Saint Brendan's fair isle."*

-- Jimmy Driftwood, "Saint Brendan"

In the misty reaches of the Atlantic, somewhere north of Columbus Day and east of Thanksgiving, bobs the oxhide curragh of Ireland's greatest traveler. Drawn by visions, driven by angels, and fed by the birds, St. Brendan the Navigator is a kind of holy shadow of the more dubious [Mandevilles](#) and Sinbads one normally finds in the bisociative bays of the Otherworld Ocean. His story is yet another founding myth for America, and another guide into the upper latitudes of weirdness, from Hell to Paradise, and all the islands in between. So, let's set sail with St. Brendan, and see what we discover.

"Then the angel said to St. Brendan, 'Here is the country, for which you looked for so long a time. You could not find it then, because God wished to reveal to you the many secrets of the great Ocean. Return now to your native country, carrying as much of the fruits of this country as your ship can transport.'"

-- *Navigatio Sancti Brendani Abbatis*, XXVIII

To begin with, we discover that the *Navigatio Sancti Brendani Abbatis*, or the *Voyage of Saint Brendan the Abbot*, is as big an enigma as Brendan himself. The best-known version was written in Norman French verse around 1120 by a papal envoy named Benedeit, who derived his poem from an anonymous Latin manuscript originally composed around 825 A.D. (Which, itself, might have been based on a seventh-century Irish original, now lost.) This earlier Latin version was so popular, in fact, that it still survives in over a hundred separate copies, most of which put their own spin on the story, which is a doozy.

Our hero, the Irish monk Brendan, meets another monk, one Barinthus (or Barrind), who tells him about a miraculous journey that Barinthus made to an island in the western sea -- the Land Promised to the Saints. Vowing to visit that land himself, Brendan builds a ship, recruits a number of followers (fourteen, or fifty, or sixty, or some other mystical number) and sets off. (In some versions, three other monks join at the last minute; since they disrupt the magic number, they come to bad ends on the sea.) He visits any number of Mandevillian islands, such as the Isle of Sheep, the Isle of Birds, the Isle of Black Devils, the Isle of Sleep, the Isle of Glass, the Isle of Blacksmiths, and the Isle of Grapes. On still other islands, he encounters other monks and hermits, and on one of them, he discovers Judas Iscariot, on "shore leave" from Hell. He also escapes a Coagulated Sea, is attacked by sea monsters and griffins, and accidentally makes camp on the back of a whale. Finally ("after seven years"), he reaches an enormous island of apples and light, where his path into the interior is blocked after forty days by a great river. Here, he meets an angel who reveals that this island is the Paradise, the Land Promised to the Saints, and sends Brendan back to Ireland spiritually fulfilled.

"Brendan eased forward. Not with style or speed, but in the same matter-of-fact manner that she had crossed three and a half thousand miles of sea. . . . Brendan nosed quietly onto the rocks. George leaped. His feet splashed, and touched ground—and I thought, 'We've made it!' . . . She had been at sea for fifty days. The exact spot of her landfall has no particular significance to the story of the early Irish voyages into the Atlantic. It was merely the place where the wind and current had brought a twentieth-century replica of the original Irish skin vessels"

-- Tim Severin, *The Brendan Voyage*

Brendan almost certainly existed, most likely born in 484 A.D. in County Kerry. He traveled to the Hebrides north of Scotland, founded a great monastery at Ardfert, and died in 577. He, or monks from Ardfert, traveled to Brittany, the Faeroes, and Wales, and eventually Brendan became the patron saint of boatmen, mariners, and (of course) whalers. In a remarkably non-crazy work entitled *Land to the West*, Arthurian enthusiast Geoffrey Ashe attempts to place Brendan's voyage on the map of the actual Atlantic, using (where possible) the actual sailing times and directions given in the *Navigatio* to reconstruct it. To Ashe, the *Navigatio* indicates that Irish monks (whether Brendan, the

community he founded, or the many who flooded after him into the ninth century) visited the Canary Islands, the Azores, the Faeroes, Iceland, Greenland, Jamaica, the Bahamas, and (of course) America, the great island, the Land Promised to the Saints. For **GURPS Aztecs** fans, Ashe even toys with (but can't quite bring himself to accept) the notion of Brendan as Quetzalcoatl, the white-robed, bearded, cross-bearing opponent of human sacrifice who came from over the sea.

A great theory, and at least part of it is true -- it is a matter of unquestionable fact that the Irish monks discovered and colonized Iceland before the Vikings. Brendan's "Island of Blacksmiths" sounds very much like a volcano such as Iceland's Mt. Hekla, the "Isles of Birds and Sheep" perfectly match the Faeroes, and even the "Isle of Glass" can be seen as an iceberg filtered through a Celtic imagination by a writer most probably working in sunny Spain. Even the more exaggerated notions are not prima facie impossible. Brendan's "Isle of Grapes" resonates very interestingly with Leif Ericsson's "Vine Land the Good," to begin with. In a fit of Heyerdahlia, sailor Tim Severin built a curragh similar to the *Navigatio* description, on an authentic Irish model, and in 1976-1977 sailed it (in two legs) from Ireland to Newfoundland via the Hebrides, Faeroes, and Iceland. Brendan's voyage (or something like it) was possible, if not particularly likely.

*"Listening to the music impels
And brings many-colors,
In the multi-colored countryside of noble gentleness.
Delight gleams from that fair cloud.
There are three times fifty distant islands
In the ocean to the west.
Larger than Erin now with
Each doubled or three times."
-- Immram Bran mac Febal*

However, such tedious reductionism overlooks the equal likelihood that the *Navigatio* was an explicitly Christian allegory. Brendan takes seven years to get to the Land of Paradise because seven is the number of Christ. He celebrates Pentecost on the Isle of Birds (the symbol of Pentecost is the Dove), Maundy Thursday on the Isle of Sheep (for the Passover Lamb), and Easter on the back of the whale (Jonah's three days in the whale equal Christ's resurrection after three days). Moreover, the *Navigatio* is also the heir to the grand Irish tradition of the *immram*, the voyage to the Otherworld. Like the Irish Otherworld, Brendan's Promised Land has apples, eternal light, a guardian fog, and so forth. The two major immrama are the *Voyage of Mael Duin* (who also sees an Isle of Glass, an Isle of Sheep, an Isle of Sleep, etc.) and the *Voyage of Bran mac Febal* which tells of the Celtic hero-god Bran the Blessed's voyage to the Otherworld. (Bran's magic Templar head [went there again](#) in 1314, of course.) These immrama all occur in the kind of archetypal sea where Odysseus and Sinbad the Sailor voyaged (Sinbad also saw Isles of Glass, Sheep, and Birds, and also picnicked on a whale's back). In short, the *Navigatio* is bisociatively history, legend, and myth.

*"For the Stories of Arthur, Malgo, and Brandon, that say a thousand yeares ago they were in the North of America; or the Fryer of Linn that by his blacke Art went to the North pole in the yeare 1360. in that I know them not. Let this suffice."
-- John Smith, General History of Virginia (1624)*

Which is where Arthur comes in. Arthur, or at least the "consensus Arthur" of archaeology and early chronology, is Brendan's contemporary; in fact, Brendan's life overlaps Arthur's on both ends. John Dee emphasized Arthur's voyages overseas to the isles of the Atlantic in his [occult-imperial propaganda](#) for the "British Empire," although Captain John Smith dismisses "Arthur, Malgo (Mael Duin), and Brandon" in the brusque sentence above. More to the point, of course, Arthur also travels to a western island paradise when he dies, Avalon; which is to say, the "Isle of Apples." And just as an angel promises St. Brendan that the Land Promised to the Saints will be revealed again when the time is right, so too will Arthur return from Avalon when needed. In fact, according to the medieval *Life of Merlin*, Arthur's boatman to Avalon was none other than Brendan's old inspiration, Barinthus. It gets better; one of the only dates in the *Navigatio* puts Brendan's seventh year at sea ninety years after the death of St. Patrick in 461 A.D. Hence, Brendan set sail in 544 A.D., just two years after Barinthus (Brendan's cousin, in some stories) brought Arthur to Avalon, according to Geoffrey of Monmouth. Was Brendan actually looking for King Arthur, in the Otherworld to the West?

"Then St. Brendan sought to animate the courage of the brethren, saying: 'Soldiers of Christ, be strong in the faith unfeigned, and in the armor of the Spirit, for we are now on the borders of Hell; watch, therefore, and act manfully.'"
-- *Navigatio Sancti Brendani Abbatis, XXIII*

This may be why Brendan picked up a "crystal chalice" from off an [emerald](#) altar on the Isle of Glass; he may have needed the Grail to heal the wounded Arthur. But the fogs that Brendan sailed through may conceal more than the secret isle of the Once and Future King. Near the Isle of Smiths, St. Brendan actually sailed near the entrance to Hell itself, far up in the [Arctic](#) wilds, and he visited and comforted Judas Iscariot. Past that "entrance" and through a "wall of fog" lay the Paradise -- perhaps the Hollow Earth, reached by sailing north through the Hole in the Pole?

Or should we take Hell and Judas literally? If so, Brendan saw the land of the dead, and spoke to one of its more prestigious inhabitants -- understandable, since geographers had placed the Greek Elysium in the "Fortunate Isles" to the west. The Land of Apples to the West also appears in Greek mythology as the Islands of the Hesperides, where grow the Golden Apples. Strabo places the Hesperides near Libya, where we last left the [Amazons](#) -- who themselves also turn up in an island paradise to the West, Calyferne. Like our putative sky-seeded Amazons, St. Brendan was also born of a "drop from above" -- *broen dian* in Irish. He also encountered other glowing ultraterrestrials with dubious goals, from his birth under an angel-filled heaven to the Isle of Birds, identified as the home of those angels who had supported neither God nor Satan -- which is to say, the [Faerie](#). Amazons, angels, faeries, [griffins](#) (guarding the Golden Apples of the Hesperides from Brendan?), and [werewolves](#) -- St. Ailbe, upon whose Isle Brendan spent every Christmas, was suckled by a she-wolf -- Brendan ran with some fast company indeed. See if your players can keep up, over wind and wave, through the Bermuda Triangle and the Hollow Earth, past griffin and leviathan to the [Paradise Promised to the Saints](#) in America.

Sergo and Iussuf

by Phil Masters

Note: In all cases, for convenience, game details assume that the pair are operating in north-west France; change their specific knowledge-related skills/abilities and languages accordingly if they are to appear elsewhere.

Ars Magica

Note: Specialties for Characteristics and Specializations for Abilities are given in parentheses.

Sergo

Age 51

Characteristics: Int -1 (Unreflective), Per -1 (Uncontemplative), Str +2 (Wiry), Sta +4 (Durable), Pre 0, Com -1 (Mumbler), Dex 0, Qik 0.

Virtues and Flaws: Great Stamina +2, Hired Sword -1, Judged Unfairly -1.

Abilities: Brawl +3 (Dodge), Single Weapon +3 (Axe), Shield and Weapon +7 (Round Shield), Chain Weapons +1 (Morningstar), Great Weapons +2 (Quarterstaff), Longshaft Weapon +3 (Spear), Thrown Weapon +2 (Javelin), Bows +1 (Short Bow), Crossbows +1 (Heavy Crossbow), Awareness +2 (Keeping Watch), Folk Ken +2 (Nobles), Guile +2 (Lying to Authority), Bargain +2 (Mercenary Service), Carouse +2 (Games of Chance), Animal Handling +2 (Mules), Ride +2 (Speed), Survival +2 (French Forests), Chirurgy +1 (Binding Wounds), Wagoneering +1 (Rough Terrain), Area Lore: France +4 (Geography), Area Lore: Levant +2 (Geography), Organization Lore: French Armies +3 (Personalities), Speak Aramaic +1 (Antioch Dialect), Speak Breton +4 (Military Slang), Speak French +2 (Military Slang).

*(Note: If using the optional combat rules in **Ordo Nobilis**, delete the "Single Weapon" Ability, raise Great Weapons to +3 and Thrown Weapon to +3, and change "Shield and Weapon" to "Single Weapon and Shield.")*

Traits: Verbose +2.

Reputations: Hired Sword (Local) -1.

Ailments: Scarred by Disease and Combat 0, Rampant Cough 1, Poor Hearing 1, All Teeth Gone 2, Arthritic Back 2.

Iussuf

Age 24

Characteristics: Int 0, Per 0, Str 0, Sta +1 (Healthy), Pre 0, Com -1 (Outsider), Dex +3 (Agile), Qik +1 (Prompt).

Virtues and Flaws: Knack (Riding) +1, Good Armaments (Composite Bow) +1, Hired

Sword -1, Outsider (Levantine) -1.

Abilities: Brawl +1 (Dodge), Single Weapon +2 (Shortsword), Shield and Weapon +3 (Mounted Spear), Longshaft Weapon +1 (Spear), Thrown Weapon +1 (Javelin), Bows +5 (Composite), Awareness +1 (Keeping Watch), Carouse +1 (Staying Sober), Ride +5 (+Knack) (Tricks), Speak Aramaic +4 (Antioch Dialect), Speak Breton +3 (Military Slang).

*(Note: If using the optional combat rules in **Ordo Nobilis**, delete the "Single Weapon" Ability, raise Brawl to +2 and Longshaft Weapon to +2, and change "Shield and Weapon" to "Single Weapon and Shield.")*

Traits: Reticence +2, Pride +1.

Reputations: Outsider in Europe (Local) -1.

GURPS

Sergo (110 points)

Attributes: ST 12 [20], DX 11 [10], IQ 10 [0], HT 14 [45].
Speed 6.25; Move 6.
Block 7; Dodge 6; Parry 6.

Advantages: Alertness +1 [5]; Ally (Iussuf, 15-) [15].

Disadvantages: Age 51 [-3]; Bad Back [-15]; Careful [-1]; Disturbing Voice (coughing and toothlessness) [-10]; Hidebound [-5]; Odious Personal Habits (Verbose Rambling) [-5].

Quirks: Doesn't care what people think of him; Never sits with his back to the door; Never volunteers [-3].

Skills: Acting (specialized in lying)-7/13 [1/2]; Animal Handling-9 [2]; Area Knowledge (France)-13 [6]; Area Knowledge (Levant)-10 [1]; Axe/Mace-13 [8]; Bow-8 [1/2]; Brawling-12 [2]; Broadsword-12 [4]; Carousing-13 [1]; Crossbow-10 [1/2]; First Aid/TL1*-9 [1]; Flail-8 [1/2]; Gambling-10 [2]; Intelligence Analysis- 8 [1]; Knife-10 [1/2]; Merchant (specialized in mercenary negotiation)-7/13 [1/2]; Polearm-9 [1/2]; Riding (Horse)-11 [2]; Savoir-Faire (Military)-11 [2]; Shield-14 [8]; Spear-13 [8]; Spear Throwing-10 [1/2]; Staff-8 [1/2]; Survival (Woodlands)-10 [2]; Tactics-7 [1/2].

*See **GURPS Low Tech** on medieval European medicine's TL.

Languages: Breton-9 (native) [0]; Aramaic-8 [1]; French-8 [1].

Iussuf (90 points)

Attributes: ST 10 [0], DX 13 [30], IQ 10 [0], HT 11 [10].
Speed 6; Move 6.
Block 7; Dodge 6; Parry 6.

Advantages: Alertness +1 [5]; Ally (Sergo, 15-) [30].

Disadvantages: Code of Honor (Pirate's) [-5]; Social Stigma (Easterner, Minority Group) [-10].

Quirks: Just realizing that Sergo isn't as good a negotiator as he claims; Protective of his dignity; Reserved [-3].

Skills: Area Knowledge (Mediterranean Lands)-9 [1/2]; Axe/Mace-11 [1/2]; Bow-14 [8]; Brawling-12 [1/2]; Buckler-14 [2]; Carousing-9 [1/2]; Equestrian Acrobatics-13 [2]; Fast-Draw (Arrow)-12 [1/2]; Riding-15 [8]; Savoir-Faire (Military)-9 [1/2]; Shortsword-13 [2]; Spear-13 [2]; Spear Throwing-13 [1].

Maneuvers: Horse Archery-13 [4].

Languages: Aramaic-10 (native) [0]; Breton-9 [1].

Mage: The Sorcerers Crusade

Note: Some of the character features used below are taken from *The Sorcerers Crusade Companion*. Some Natures/Demeanors are taken from *Mage: the Ascension*, which offers a wider choice. Specialties and Variations are noted in brackets where applicable.

Sergo

Nature: Loner

Demeanor: Survivor

Attributes: Strength/3, Dexterity/2, Stamina/5 (Durable), Charisma/2, Manipulation/2, Appearance/2, Perception/3, Intelligence/2, Wits/3.

Talents: Alertness/3, Brawl/2, Carousing/1, Dodge/3, Hunting/1, Intimidation/1, Larceny/3, Subterfuge/1.

Skills: Animal Ken/2, Archery/1, Melee/4 (Shield Fighting), Survival/2, Torture/1.

Knowledges: Culture/1, Linguistics/2 (native French, learned Greek and Breton), Medicine/1.

Backgrounds: Allies/1 (Iussuf), Resources/1.

Flaws: Craven Image, Disturbing Mannerism (Verbose Rambling).

Willpower: 6

Iussuf

Nature: Waif

Demeanor: Conformist

Attributes: Strength/3, Dexterity/4 (Agile), Stamina/3, Charisma/2, Manipulation/1, Appearance/3, Perception/3, Intelligence/3, Wits/2.

Talents: Alertness/2, Athletics/3, Brawl/2, Dodge/3.

Skills: Acrobatics/2, Archery/4 (Mounted), Etiquette/1, Melee/3, Riding/5.

Knowledges: Culture/2, Linguistics/1 (native Greek, learned French).

Backgrounds: Allies/1 (Sergo), Resources/1.

Willpower: 5

Notes

Equipment

As jobbing mercenaries, Sergo and Iussuf are somewhat defined by their armor and weapons, which will vary with the date of the game's setting, and also with their precise financial situation and current employment. In general, Sergo will be wearing scale or mail armor (perhaps something lighter, if that's the best that he can do), and carry a one-handed axe or sword and a round, medium-sized shield, plus sometimes a spear. Iussuf will usually wear light, quilted fabric armor and carry a shortsword, a light spear, or lance, perhaps some javelins or darts, and a round shield or buckler; his most important and carefully-tended possession, however, is his eastern-style composite bow.

Background

Sergo and his brother Jan were the third and fourth sons of a free but poor European peasant family, with no obvious prospects of doing more than sinking lower in the world if they stayed home. So they took the same route out as many another, and became soldiers, taking employment where they found it. Eventually, they heard about fighting in the East, and decided that this sounded good; the rumor was that God would forgive you for killing heathens easier than he would for the, well, sometimes unavoidable things that soldiers had to do anywhere else.

They rattled around there together for a few years until they had their big falling out -- over a woman. Sergo can't remember the details now, but Jan wound up marrying the wench while Sergo took ship back home. Not that he stopped soldiering, though; the money never lasted, the promotions never came, and he seemed to have a knack for not getting killed.

He can't actually count how many years later it was that the dark, lightly-built lad walked into a tavern and introduced himself. It turned out that Jan and his wife had died in some local plague out east, and before he went, Jan had told the boy that, as there was less and less scope for an honest Christian to survive in that part of the world, he ought to look for his relatives elsewhere. It was a long way to come, but Jan was always the wise one; according to recent sailors' tales, he was probably right about the east getting too hot for a Christian family. The kid, Iussuf, was a fighter, too -- he'd trained in the eastern style, with a bow, from horseback. That could be a saleable skill in these parts -- which was good, because while family was family, Sergo still didn't know any way else to live.

So the old footsoldier and the light cavalryman are looking for employment together. They're an odd team, but *someone* must have work for them.

Note: This background should fit into any European-based campaign, any time between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries. In, say, an *Ars Magica* game set in the usual c. 1220 AD period, Sergo will have gone out to the Levant with the Third Crusade, and Iussuf may have shipped out for Europe in the wake of the failure of the Fifth Crusade. Likewise, in a *Mage: The Sorcerers Crusade* game set in the 1450s, Sergo would have worked as a mercenary for the Byzantines, while Iussuf will have got out of that part of the world just ahead of the fall of Constantinople in 1453, or perhaps departed some Greek outpost just after that event, before the Turks arrived to mop up. Sergo has infantry skills that are universally applicable in virtually any pre-gunpowder setting, and years of experience at doing whatever seems needful. Iussuf fights as what the Crusaders called a "Turcopole," a light cavalryman who can match Turkish opponents at their own game. Iussuf is at his best on horseback, but he can't afford a horse at present; a sensible employer will find him one.

Personalities

The primary secret of Sergo's survival is also the reason why he's never become anything more than a footsoldier; he's got what will one day be called the classic grunt mindset. He never volunteers, and never believes too much of what the higher ranks tell him. (It also doesn't hurt that he has a near-indestructible constitution.) While he's neither cowardly nor treacherous, he believes that the most important thing in any battle is living to fight another day, and he's "borrowed" more than a few riderless horses in the wake of more than a few military screw-ups in his time.

That said, he's also noticeably lacking in either imagination or charisma, which means that he doesn't try very hard to find a better place for himself, and no one bothers to offer him many chances. He has a terrible tendency to ramble rather vaguely about his past career, which drives many people to teeth-grinding annoyance. ("When I stood with the spears, 'longside Couer de Leon at Jaffa -- mind you, most o' the lads at that fight were eyetie sailors, not that I've got nothing 'gainst sailors, like, or eyeties -- knew this eyetie girl once . . . But where was I, oh, yus, Jaffa, durin' the Crusade. Well, I stood with the spears there, y'know, 'longside ol' Couer de Leon, God rest 'im, good man 'e was . . .") He doesn't worry much about what people think of him, which may be just as well.

Iussuf is a little sharper, and rather quieter. Dignity and pride are quite important to him, and he is keenly aware that he is a distrusted foreigner in these parts, so he tends to hold back and let Sergo do the talking -- although he is increasingly realizing that this may not always be wise. But if he says anything, it's too easy for some local oaf to make trouble. A lot of them even seem to think he must be a Muslim, which causes him pain; he has *fought* for Christianity, and he will explain with some heat that he was baptized in the greatest Christian church of his (Christian) home city. Actually, he's technically a member of the Eastern Orthodox church, but he doesn't draw fine distinctions, and thanks to his willingness to pray in any convenient church, no-one with any religious standing has questioned him yet. He'd probably convert to Roman Catholicism just to avoid trouble, if necessary.

Although they don't seem to have much in common, uncle and nephew are mutually loyal. Each simply takes it for granted that standing by your family is the right thing to do. Having Iussuf around reminds Sergo of his youth and the good days out east with his brother, while Iussuf has learned to let Sergo's ramblings wash over him as a comfortable, meaningless noise. Although military duties may send them in different directions, each does his best to keep an eye out for the other.

Game Uses

Sergo and Iussuf have several different potential functions in games. To begin with, they're excellent "hired guard" material. (They were detailed using the rules for "grog" in *Ars Magica*, and are approximately equal to standard men-at-arms in *Mage: The Sorcerers Crusade*, albeit with low Background ratings to reflect their itinerant mercenary lives.) They have genuinely effective combat skills, and their rather marginal social status means that they would be happier than most to accept employment with weird wizards and other player-character types. Of course, an employer would also have to deal with Sergo's increasing decrepitude, Iussuf's foreign ways and pride, and the fact that each is only really loyal to the other.

Second, while they aren't primarily intended as villains, it's not impossible that they might turn bandit if no safer employment opportunities presented themselves. In that case, they'd probably cost a few lone travelers their purses, while being canny enough to avoid most hunters. If they joined a larger group, they could increase its effectiveness quite a bit; Sergo can stand off opposing troops by fighting defensively with sword and shield, while Iussuf's shooting would make him a menace from ambush. Of course, in a Robin Hood-style game, they can be both outlaws *and* heroes, adding to the variety and style of a band that may also include the PCs.

And lastly, whatever their current employment (if any) they are also useful as sources of role-playing entertainment. They could be useful as a source of information for European characters thinking of traveling to the east, or for someone wanting information about the Crusades, while an evening simply spent carousing with them might amuse and distract some PCs. Sergo can be played as an archetypal rambling old codger, while Iussuf acts as his quiet straight-man; the former would certainly be willing to advise younger would-be hired swords on the ins and outs of the profession, the uselessness of most commanders, and the inadvisability of ever volunteering for anything. Extracting the nuggets of genuinely useful advice from his meanderings would require patience and judgment. Of course, PCs

who had experienced this aspect of the pair might need a moment to adjust if they ever had to deal with Sergo's canny, ruthless melee fighting style and Iussuf's sharp-shooting.

The Wolfsbanner

by Volker Bach

Kurt raised his crossbow to chest height before he quietly stepped across the clearing. Tonight the reckoning was due. For months the wolves had plagued the villages of his lord, taking sheep, pigs and chickens, breaking into stalls and hurdles, until two weeks ago -- the hunter crossed himself hastily as the memories surfaced -- one of them had killed the daughter of Anselm the miller. Bad winter, Kurt thought. Nothing to eat in the forest. Wolves always came into the valleys when the snows stayed too long. Nothing for it but setting traps.

The moonlight cast the shadows of branches and tree trunks over the snow of the clearing, almost obscuring the tracks. Kurt drew his cloak closer about him and involuntarily cast about anxious glances. He knew that wolves fled from armed men, but one heard stories . . . There was the trap, right on the pass the pack used for their forays. The rustling and growling noises told him that one of the greycoats had been careless. Smiling, the hunter stepped into the path -- and froze in his tracks. The old man stood right in front of him, though Kurt could have sworn he had not been anywhere near a heartbeat before. Ragged and dirty, he could almost be a beggar -- almost. Were it not for the eyes, the yellow eyes that made Kurt's flesh creep and rooted his feet to the spot. The stranger bowed his head knowingly and spoke, very quietly: "My poor Grimma." he said accusingly. "Her foot is broken. Now we must feed her, too." Fervently murmuring a prayer, Kurt tried to tear his eyes from the hypnotic glare as grey shadows materialised from the underbrush. The hunter raised no hand in his own defense.

The dark forests of Central Europe are the home of the *wolfsbanner*, the man who runs with the wolves. For centuries the farmers and herdsmen of France, Germany, Poland, Bohemia, Hungary, and the Balkans spoke with fear of the savage, cunning leaders of the wolfpacks that slew their sheep, their cattle, and their children. Outcasts from the society of Christian men they were, devilspawn, given strange powers by the Dark One to torment the good folk. Some legends claim that no wolf will kill a human child unless driven to it by a *wolfsbanner*, who craves the blood of innocents and owes his infernal masters the life of a human each month. Others say that *wolfsbanner* teach their charges to open doorlatches, undo knots, even walk on their hind legs and imitate human voices the better to prey on the farmers. Leading them on their raids they can see through their eyes, guide their steps and speak through their mouths. Often they were thought capable of changing into a wolf or other wild animal at will. Fearful peasants spoke of other magic, too, luring animals and children into the forest, throwing pursuers off the track and proofing the coats of the wolves against arrow and shot. Sometimes a *wolfsbanner* would come into a village demanding food and money, and woe betide the farmer who denied him.

The *wolfsbanner* makes a wonderful addition to any classic fantasy campaign, not least because so little about him is certain. Nobody but the GM need know what is truth and what legend. *Wolfsbanner* are invariably described as old men, painfully gaunt and wiry and dressed in uncured hides, rags and the tattered remnants of human clothing. Their eyes are those of wolves, yellow and piercing, and are thought to have hypnotic powers. Anyone looking directly at them becomes rooted to the spot, unable to move until he breaks free of the gaze, or is given permission. This power can be treated as a Contest of Will in game terms, with the target taking penalties depending on circumstances, failed fright checks and the real danger of the situation. Disdaining the comforts of settled life, *wolfsbanner* live in the forest summer and winter, travelling with their wolf packs and living on raw flesh, berries and grubs. They are as fast, strong and agile as their wolf companions, have preternaturally sharp senses and can see at night as well as during the day. Eschewing the company of humans they live alone with their pack. They use no tools or weapons (except, in rare cases, staves and knives) and though they can speak human languages they will talk to the wolves in their tongue. What little human-made items they need they will steal or demand with menaces from villagers and travellers or take from the bodies of their victims.

Wolfsbanner

ST 10 DX 14 IQ 10 HT 13

Advantages: Extra Fatigue +2, Cast-Iron Stomach, Alertness +4, Night Vision, Speak With Animals (Wolves), Ally Group (wolfpack, always)

Disadvantages: Primitive (TL0), Intolerance (settled people), Social Stigma (Outlaw)

What else the *wolfsbanner* can do, or not do, is up to the GM. If it is true that abandoned children raised by wolves become *wolfsbanner* they will be little more than savage humans with a number of wolves to aid them. An adventure could be based on the capture or rescue (depending how you look at it) of one such child. Trying to communicate with an angry, alienated teenager who commands twenty wolves and speaks no human language can make a memorable episode, and the morality of taking a child from its loving wolf family to return it to an uncaring human community is an issue for the players to expound.

Other possibilities are better suited to a fantasy campaign, though. *Wolfsbanner* were often thought to be evil sorcerers, capable of great feats. If they are indeed in league with the devil and use the wolves to sate their craving for the blood of children they are a menace to be rooted out in the good old heroic manner. This may not be easy as the dark wizard can turn himself into a wolf, watch the party's every move through the eyes of his pack or any other creature of the dark, including crows, owls, spiders and rats. Hidden in his lair deep in the forest, protected by fiercely loyal wolves and warded by magic, finding him may be the biggest challenge. If he also has combat magic at his disposal he and his wolves could prove a lethal threat to a hasty party whose swords and arrows prove useless against the savagely attacking beasts. Of course such monsters have weaknesses -- silver, hazelwood, fire, salt or holy relics drive them away in some legends, prayer or the sound of church bells in others.

To make the *wolfsbanner* a tortured soul rather than a monster of evil could be equally interesting. Some legend holds that he is a huntsman who was banished to live in the forest with the wolves for preferring the chase to church on a high holiday. This or any other transgression may see a miscreant sentenced to an eternal existence among wild animals by an angry deity. Maybe the banished sinner, embittered by long years of privation and loneliness, has forsworn his humanity and seeks to wreak his revenge on all who still live in the company of friends and family that has been taken from him. Maybe he earnestly tries to expiate his sin, to be readmitted to the flock of the faithful or relieved of the burden of his existence, and needs the help of the PCs. Or possibly he has not been justly punished by a deity but maliciously cursed by a sorcerer or demon. Freeing such a *wolfsbanner* could be as heroic a feat as killing the malicious kind, and he might even make an interesting PC himself.

Folkorists have long realised that the hatred of the church and the fear of the people may well mean the *wolfsbanner* hails from an earlier, pagan age of Europe. An old god of the wild, reduced to this tattered form, or an angry forest spirit roused into action by the inroads civilisation has made into what once was virgin forest, are as plausible explanations for the *wolfsbanner* as any. Perhaps he is a malign, primal entity driven by inveterate hatred for men who imprison wild animals and cut down ancient forest for grainfields, or a local deity from the distant past, once placated by sacrifice and now arisen to claim his due from the herds by fair means or foul. The ancient druidic priest of such a deity, living a life dedicated to the wild in a manner not understood by his contemporaries, is even more interesting as a scenario seed. He may not even be hostile. Instead, he may be genuinely trying to strike a balance, to convince the farmers that they must give the spirits of the wild and their children, the wolves, something in compensation for the forest ranges they have taken from them, and to make the wolves confine themselves to sheep and cattle where children would be such easy prey. His efforts would be met with hostility by tight-fisted farmers who blamed him for the inroads on their flocks, or complied with by an uncomprehending, cowed and sullen populace waiting their opportunity for revenge. In a more primeval setting the *wolfsbanner* could even be a recognised priest, regarded with fear and awe and placated with gifts and sacrifice by the people. Or maybe all the talk of placating the forest gods is just the spiel of a canny animal mage running a local protection racket. Whatever the lean, dark man in the forest is, he is not to be trifled with.

Pyramid Review

Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone Quidditch Card Game



Published by [Mattel](#)

\$6.99

Harry Potter has taken over the world, and in the *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone Quidditch Card Game* you get to imagine a small but popular piece of J.K. Rowling's fictional world.

Quidditch, if you've been in hiding in a Highland cave the last few years, is the most popular athletic event among wizards and witches. The sport is played with two opposing teams of six players. Each team has players in four positions: Two Chasers are tasked with putting the Quaffle (a soccer-size ball) through any of three goal hoops. The Keeper, like a hockey goalie, is stationed to prevent this if he can. Two Beaters attempt to whack the two heavy Bludgers (jet-black, slightly smaller and heavier than Quaffles) to interfere with the other team. Finally, the Seeker hunts the tiny and elusive Golden Snitch. Snaring the Snitch ends the game and scores a hefty bonus in points.

The card game is played by two players (ages 8 and up, according to Mattel). Each player receives a team deck which is shuffled and set to the side. These decks are identical for each player (barring differences in art) and include cards for the team positions (with "strength" point values), dirty tricks cards, and counter-dirty-tricks cards. Each player draws five cards from his own deck.

A third deck represents the playing field or "pitch." The pitch deck has only the three types of balls in play in *Quidditch*. As with the sport, only Beater cards may be played on Bludger cards and only Seekers may be played effectively on the Golden Snitch. A loophole in the rules allows any Player card to be played on the Quaffle; this should be only Chasers or Keepers, I suspect.

In each turn one player turns up a new card from the pitch deck and gets to decide if he wants to play on it. (In some cases he has no choice.) If he does, he and his opponent both select a card which can legally be used on that pitch card. These are revealed simultaneously, and the player with the higher "strength" card takes the pitch card (or blocks the goal, leaving the pitch card in play.) Jinx, Spell, Foul or Referee cards can be played immediately before or after the players lays down a card.

After all the players and balls on the pitch have been resolved, the turn passes, hands are redrawn to five cards (unless some team member got Bludgered and you're not allowed to completely refill your hand), and the other player gets to turn out the next ball and decide what to do. Play continues until one player captures a specific pitch card: the Golden Snitch. The highest scorer wins -- 10 points for each Quaffle scored, plus 150 points for the Snitch. (A more challenging variant suggested in the rules gives only 50 bonus points for the Snitch.)

At its heart, *Quidditch* is an amplified version of the venerable card game "War." Being permitted to select the card to play from your hand is a good way to introduce elements of strategy and the potential for bluffing. Limiting the types of cards that can be used at any given time is an authentic-feeling wrinkle, and the assorted dirty tricks cards add extra play value without harming simplicity.

The card art is clear enough -- a bunch of kids sailing about on brooms. The young people all look sufficiently generic except for the Seeker card which represents Harry himself. The team cards are decorated in the house colors and seals of Harry's own house, Gryffindor, and their arch-rivals from House Slytherin. Potter purists will object to the garb: the Quidditch robes look more like bathrobes-over-tee-shirts with jeans and tennis shoes. So be it.

Quidditch is marred by the usual bane of the mass market game: unclear rules. These are written on a two-sided 4-1/2" by 16" sheet similar to that used for that other venerable Mattel card game, *Uno*. Small print in a "theme" type face make the rules unpleasant to read. Spotty organization leaves the rules on when Special Cards may be used to the final six inches of the back page. There's also the probable error allowing even the Seeker to take up a Quaffle and score if he can. Fortunately the game itself is so simple that it almost gets away without needing printed rules at all.

I'll add another *Quidditch* quibble for the packaging. The cards come in two shrink-wrapped bundles inside a light-cardstock pouch. While this fold-up pouch is swell for store display, it's unhelpful for keeping the cards orderly once the wrapping is off, and the cardstock won't stand up to repeated use. Expect to need to resort to rubber bands to keep your cards after a not-too-long-while.

The *Quidditch Card Game* plays quickly (perhaps very quickly if the Snitch turns up early). It may not exactly capture the essence of Quidditch (though I think the addition of a play-by-play announcer would fix that), but for your seven bucks you get a playable fast-moving card game that should keep the Harry Potter fans in your house distracted for many a match. Brooms up! And good luck!

-- *Bob Portnell*

Pyramid Pick

Tigris & Euphrates

Published by [Mayfair Games](#)

Designed by Reiner Knizia

Illustrated by Stephen Walsh

Boxed Game (2-4 players, 60-90 minutes); \$50

A lot of games claim to have fresh and unique ideas, but many of them fail to fulfill that promise. And if there is something really original, too often it simply does not work -- maybe it was not playtested enough, maybe it was a bad idea from the start. I'll try to explain in the following review why *Tigris & Euphrates* is that rare diamond in a coal mine, an idea that is truly and brilliantly unique. And why, nevertheless, it might not necessarily be a game for everybody. Considering the price tag of \$50, the latter is certainly something one would like to know before buying the game.

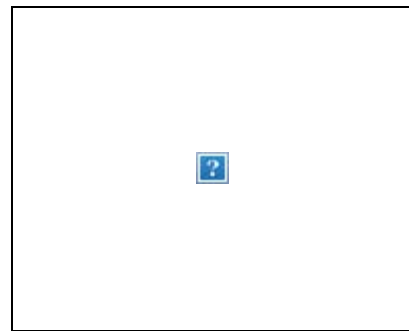
So what is it all about and what will you find in the box? The playing board is a very beautiful map of the land between Euphrates and Tigris. As the game unfolds, small kingdoms will flower on its squares, grow larger and inevitably clash with each other. Your goal during all of this is to garner as much influence for your dynasty as possible. Each player gets a little screen to hide his nefarious schemes behind and four leader playing pieces with the symbol of his dynasty, one for each of the important areas of prebiblical politics. These areas are marked by a color -- red for the Priest (religion), black for the King (population), green for the Merchant (trade) and the Farmer (food) gets blue. The tiles that you'll use to build up kingdoms also belong to one of the areas, there are Temples, Settlements, Markets and Farms. Each player draws six of these at random at the start of the game and keeps them behind his screen.

Your basic move is to enlarge a kingdom where one of your leaders is in control with a tile of the corresponding color. This will earn you a victory point for that area, which neatly explains what you do with the many small woodblocks in red, black, green and blue you'll also find in the box. For example, playing a Markets tile next to a kingdom with your Merchant in it will earn you a trade victory point, so you take a green block and put it behind your screen.

Which does, so far, not sound all that exciting. Two twists transcend this rather simple mechanism into a game that feels unlike anything else I've played. The first twist is a rather simple one: your victory points are decided by your weakest rating in the four areas. This is, in fact, so simple that there's bound to be another game that uses it, even though I cannot think of one. What it does for *Tigris & Euphrates* is to ensure that the color you are most in need of is the one that is hardest to score in -- while it is relatively easy to reap in lots of points in an area you are already strong in, chances are that these points are not going to help you win the game.

The second twist is far more crucial and probably illustrated best in the context of what you can do in your turn. There are four possible actions, and you can execute any two of them (or do the same action twice). One of them is placing a tile, which I've already explained above. The second is discarding up to six of your tiles and replacing them randomly. The third is playing one of your two Catastrophe tiles, which destroys the tile it is placed upon. The fourth is placing one of your leaders on the map, either in an existing kingdom or in a new one (and always adjacent to one or more temples). After you're done, you redraw the tiles you've used and the next player gets his move. If there are not enough tiles to redraw, the game ends at once.

And here comes the twist: Leaders of different players may coexist peacefully as long as they are not the same type.



My Priest and your King will get along just fine, and even if another player brings in his Merchant and his Farmer, nobody will get hurt. Things will only get hairy if there are, for example, two Priests or two Merchants in one kingdom, which can happen by unifying two kingdoms with a new tile or by just placing a new leader in an existing kingdom. In both cases, the leaders will fight it out and the weaker one will be returned to its player, but how the conflict is resolved depends upon its cause.

If you place a new leader in an existing kingdom, the number of Temples adjacent to the new and the old leader decide the conflict, and both players can add more Temples from behind their screen. The losing leader leaves, the victor garners a red victory point. If kingdoms are united, conflicting leaders count all tiles of the corresponding color in their kingdom and the player can add more tiles to win the conflict. Again, the losing leader is taken from the map. This time, however, all tiles of his color are leaving the kingdom with him. And the winner does not only get a victory point for his vanquished adversary, but also for each of the removed tiles.

This dynamic is what makes *Tigris & Euphrates* such a special game -- there is no such thing as My Kingdom, Your Kingdom but instead an evershifting web of alliances, rivalry and conflicts. And there is a subtle seesaw effect in defending your leaders, because the more tiles of his area there are in his kingdom, the more other leaders will be attracted to usurp his position from within. If, on the other hand, you choose to entrench his position with Temples, there is less time to build up the kingdom with Markets, Settlements, and Farms.

There are some more options and complications added to this basic game engine -- joker victory points that only the Merchant can collect, monuments created by placing four same tiles in a square, and other things -- all of which do add nicely to the game but also make its tactics hard to grasp at once. Prepare to play once or twice just to get acquainted with *Tigris & Euphrates*, even though the rules are neither long nor complicated. It's just that different from other boardgames.

Any reasons I can find not to run and buy this game lie in its nature, not its execution. In spite of its lavish, atmospheric components, *Tigris & Euphrates* is an abstract game -- the mesopotamian veneer is not actively clashing with the mechanics, but it is veneer nonetheless. The game itself could have been about sulphur mining on Frinibaxx III and you'd never know. Were it not for the art of Stephen Walsh, I might even have preferred the Frinibaxx III version . . . this might be the place to mention that I was sorely tempted to buy the Mayfair version of the game in addition to my German original just because of his illustrations ("Amerika, du hast es besser!" -- J.W. von Goethe). Nevertheless, there is very little immersion, let alone roleplaying elements like the aliens in *Cosmic Encounter* or even the quirky robots in *Roborally*.

But it is, to close this review with the praise the game truly deserves, darn close to the Holy Grail of abstract games. It is easy to learn, with lots of depth and complexity; it works wonderfully for two, three, or four players, and there are no long waiting times between turns . . . you name it, it's there.

--Maik Hennebach

Pyramid Review

Burning Shaolin (for d20/Feng Shui)

Published by [Atlas Games](#)

Written by Robin D. Laws

Illustrated by Mike Dutton

\$8.95

For the *d20* system and the Open Gaming License, Robin D. Laws' *Burning Shaolin* marks the beginning of something different. Under the all-encompassing *d20* label, the *Dungeons & Dragons 3rd Edition* player has been exposed to a horde of new settings and even a new genre or two, but never before to a new setting, a new genre and a completely different game system in one go! *Burning Shaolin* does all that because it is the first of Atlas Games' titles under their Coriolis imprint, which crosses one of their games with the *d20* System. As the title suggests, *Burning Shaolin* is a crossover between the swords and sorcery of *d20* and the furious-fists-and-all-guns-blazing game of Hong Kong action, *Feng Shui*.

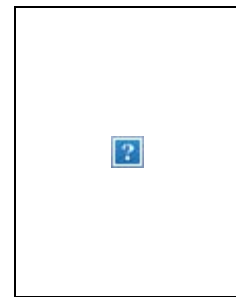
It should be made clear from the start what *Burning Shaolin* is not. It is not meant to be a conversion guide between the two game systems. Instead the intention is to introduce new players to Atlas Games' RPGs, to inject back into the *d20* system some of the rules and gaming innovations seen in *Feng Shui* -- and also *Unknown Armies* and *Ars Magica*, both of which will get their own Coriolis titles, also expose books for those games to the potential sales of popular *d20* titles.

Thus in *Burning Shaolin* we have an adventure that can be run under either *d20* or *Feng Shui*. For the latter game, it is suitable for beginning characters and players, while for *d20* it needs a party of sixth to eighth level characters; otherwise they will be unable to face the kind of high-kicking, butt-whopping action to be found in your average *Feng Shui* game. Although the starting point for most *Feng Shui* games is the modern juncture, the Hong Kong of the late twentieth century is wildly inappropriate to a fantasy game; fortunately both Hong Kong movies and *Feng Shui* offer up other alternatives. These would be the RPG's 69 A.D. Juncture, and Hong Kong's wuxia fantasy genre of martial arts and high wire action. So a DM coming to *Burning Shaolin* afresh should look to the films *A Chinese Ghost Story* and *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* for their inspiration, while all this should be old hat to the *Feng Shui GM*.

d20 DMs need nothing more than the three core books to run *Burning Shaolin*. This is not necessarily so for the *Feng Shui GM*, who can get away with just the core rulebook, but may need more should he not want to start out his campaign in 69 A.D. Thus if the GM wants to expand upon getting his players back in time, he can make use of *Elevator to the Netherworld*, in addition to beefing up the opponents in *Burning Shaolin* if the characters have been played a few times.

The three-color layout of *Burning Shaolin* is similar in style to that of Atlas Games *d20* Penumbra imprint, and the book is easy to read and use. The author's writing is light in tone and peppered with the kind of advice seen in other *Feng Shui* adventures. Mike Dutton's interior illustrations are rather scratchy in places, and the smaller pieces work better than the larger ones. Every effort is made to make material relevant to each game system clearly marked. Thus anything pertaining to *Feng Shui* remains in black with the rest of the text and is marked with a black tiger symbol, while the *d20* stuff is printed in a red-brown terracotta color with a red dragon symbol.

Burning Shaolin is meant to be read and played, and is organised so the relevant material is close by when the referee needs it. Thus for the adventure's first fight scene, the rules for running fast-paced action movie-style combat under



the *d20* system is close at hand. These break down into two rule sets, one covering how to throw a "Faceless Horde" at the party and another on the gravity-defying "Wuxia" style of combat necessary to get into the *Feng Shui* oeuvre. Modelled on the *Feng Shui RPG*, the Faceless Horde rules work by allowing an individual member of the horde to be taken down with a single, not overly powerful hit, increasing a character's number of attacks, and by increasing the effectiveness of some the combat orientated feats a character might possess. Horde members are generally ineffective, but can up their maximum damage on lucky shots. The rules for Wuxia Style Combat encourage players to describe and perform stunts in combat by rewarding them with extra experience points, as well as advising on how to handle improvised weapons, ignoring gravity and so on. These two pages of rules are clear and simple, and once into the flow of the game, the DM should rarely have the need to refer back to them.

[SPOILER ALERT]

The plot to *Burning Shaolin* is quite simple. Told in three acts, it opens with the players coming upon a group of martial artists who have not only been severely beaten, but poisoned in the bargain! Once the players have dealt with the faceless horde left to finish them off this band, known as The Crippled Heroes, they can learn that behind it all is an evil demonic sorcerer known as Kan Huei. Though dying, the Crippled Heroes urge the heroes to take up their task and stop Kan Huei from taking over a feng shui site. Plus they need to get the poison used by the sorcerer so that a ritual can heal The Crippled Heroes.

Finding out more about Kan Huei involves a short -- and definitely strange for many *Dungeons & Dragons* players -- excursion into the Netherworld, before raiding the sorcerer's base inside the crater of a volcano. From there the party can find out where Kan Huei is planning to attack and rush to the Shaolin temple for the showdown in the final reel. And yes, there were no Shaolin Temples in 69 A.D., but this is *Feng Shui* and is far from important.

[END SPOILER ALERT]

In *Burning Shaolin*, what you have is an adventure that can be played using two distinctly different game systems. Because of that it does add more in terms of rules to the *d20* system than it does to *Feng Shui*. Unfortunately in doing so -- and effectively, it should be pointed out -- it leaves room for what is really only a relatively short adventure. *Burning Shaolin* only gives us an evening's worth of gaming, and because it is set in 69 A.D. it may not be where the *Feng Shui* GM wants to take his players. For the *d20* referee, *Burning Shaolin* may also prove to be less useful because the DM has to get his players to China or an equivalent for it to work. Thus because it covers two game systems, it does not offer as much as an adventure of similar length for just of those game systems. For the *Feng Shui* GM, this release offers slightly less value for money than *Four Bastards*, Atlas Games' previous adventure in this format.

Yet to be fair, *Burning Shaolin* achieves what it sets out to do: provide an adventure that a Feng Shui GM can run with relative ease, and introduce the *d20* player to an alternative style of play. Atlas Games deserves some applause for trying something a little different, and I look forward to the *Unknown Armies* Coriolis title, *Ascension of the Magdalene*, with interest.

--Matthew Pook

All The Better To Bisociate You With, My Dear: Little Red Riding Hood

"Because this Mr. Karswell had evidently set out with the intention of frightening these poor village children out of their wits, and I do believe, if he had been allowed to go on, he would actually have done so. He began with some comparatively mild things. Red Riding Hood was one, and even then, Mr. Farrer said, the wolf was so dreadful that several of the smaller children had to be taken out: and he said Mr. Karswell began the story by producing a noise like a wolf howling in the distance, which was the most gruesome thing he had ever heard."

-- M.R. James, "Casting the Runes"

Once upon a time, there was a little story that everybody knew, because it had a bright red hood and a dark, dark forest. What was under that hood might have been a goddess, or a monster -- and the same thing was true of the dark, dark forest. But deep in that forest lay Grandmother's house, full of good things for children like lycanthropy, cannibalism, and alchemy. So let's follow the story into the woods, then, and pick some bright, disturbing flowers for Grandmother.

"Once upon a time there was a sweet little maiden. Whoever laid eyes upon her could not help but love her. But it was her grandmother who loved her most. She could never give the child enough. One time, she made her a present, a small red velvet cap, and since it was so becoming, the girl always wanted to wear only this. So she was called Little Red Cap."

-- Jakob and Wilhelm Grimm, "Little Red Cap" (1816)

The most familiar version of "Little Red Riding Hood" comes to us from the indefatigable Brothers Grimm: little girl in red on her way to grandma's house, warned against straying from the path, meets a wolf, strays anyway, wolf eats grandma and dresses in her clothes, plays riddle game with the little girl, eats her in turn, is fortuitously killed by a woodsman, little girl and grandma emerge unscathed. The Grimms got their version from a woman of Huguenot descent named Marie Hassenpflug in around 1811. She, in turn, likely read the earlier version set down by Charles Perrault in 1697, in which the girl is not warned against straying, and is equally unfairly eaten up at the end with no rescue.

Perrault's version is, in turn, a literary reconstruction of an older folktale, about which controversy continues to rage. Folklorists divide the honors for "original version" between the "happy ending" (in which the girl fools the wolf into letting her leave the house to urinate and escapes) and the "unhappy ending" (in which, as in Perrault, the girl is eaten up). Marxist folklorist Jack Zipes, in *The Trials and Tribulations of Little Red Riding Hood*, plumps solidly for the happy ending, seeing the story as a female empowerment story of initiation into adulthood originating among the seamstresses of the upper Loire Valley in the late Middle Ages. The cultural historian Robert Darnton, in *The Great Cat Massacre*, holds out for the unhappy ending, seeing it as expressive of the fatalism and rawness of French peasant life. In both versions, however, the girl answers a first riddle from the wolf (concerning which path to take), eats grandma herself, and burns all her clothing before getting into bed with the wolf. Labyrinths, cannibalism, and bestiality: there's obviously something more in Red Riding Hood's basket.

*"And oh, how happy any child would be
Who could put on a fine red cap, like me!"*

-- Ludwig Tieck, *The Life and Death of Little Red Cap* (1800)

To begin with, the Illuminati are hiding in there. Little Red Riding Hood doesn't become "Little Red Cap" in the Grimm version by accident; the "red cap" is the symbol of the Jacobin revolutionaries in France, and of the other Illuminated revolutionary movements across the Grimms' German principalities. The euphoniouly-named Hans-Wolf Jaeger has argued that the Grimm version is an explicit political tale of foolish German revolutionaries swallowed up by the revolution they courted, and the woodsman, or hunter, becomes the pure spirit of the German people -- and, of the German police (also called "hunters"). Jaeger finds many references to the French occupiers as "wolves" in the

literature of the contemporaneous Rhineland, and evidences Tieck's 1800 play *The Life and Death of Little Red Cap* with its staunchly feminist Red Cap and her lengthy soliloquies to the color red, which leaves the hunter's green "as far behind it as kings the crowd." Red is also the color of the French *oriflamme* battle flag, and of the Rosicrucians, while we're totting up secret histories.

*"And if this occurs it is not so strange
When the wolf should eat them.
I say the wolf, for all wolves
Are not of the same kind."*

-- from the moral to "Little Red Riding Hood," by Charles Perrault (1697)

But the wolf is less clear; as Perrault says, "all wolves are not of the same kind." In fact, the resistance against the French (Red Cap) invasion was led by wolves, the [Wehrwolves](#) of the Landssturm. And in fact, as we begin to look at the Big Bad Wolf more closely, we notice a disturbing tendency to transform -- from wolf to grandma and back -- and to disguise his true nature sufficiently that Little Red Riding Hood will banter with him in the woods rather than fleeing in terror. Perhaps our Big Bad Wolf is a Big Bad Werewolf, instead. In fact, in one of the oral versions recorded in the Nivernais in 1885, the wolf is explicitly referred to as a *bzou*, cognate with *garou*, both of which mean "werewolf" or "witch" rather than wolf (*loup*) per se. Indeed, the central body of Little Red Riding Hood stories comes from exactly the same area (the upper Loire, the Alps, and the Tyrol) as the great werewolf trials of the late 16th century. In this context, it's interesting to note that one infallible sign of werewolvbery was red hair -- a red cap of hair, say. In Scots legend, the skinchanging selkies wore red caps, as did cannibalistic faeries who dipped their hats in the blood of their victims. Could Red herself be such an ogress, a werewolf, especially given her later emergence, like the medieval werewolf, from a wolf's skin?

"Take thou ten ounces of the red Sun, that is to so say, very fine, clean and purified nine or ten times by means of the voracious wolf alone: two ounces of the royal Saturnia; melt this in a crucible, and when it is melted, cast into it the ten ounces of fine gold; melt these two together, and stir them with a lighted charcoal. Then will thy gold be a little opened."

-- apocryphal "Testament of Nicolas Flamel" (1806)

And while we're on the subject of occult transformations, it's interesting to note that one school of alchemy -- also popular in France during the werewolf trials -- calls for the "grey wolf" to devour "the red Sun" or to "burn the Red King to ashes." Does this explain the burning of Red Riding Hood's cloak in the fire? Antimony, which readily alloyed itself with other metals, was the "devouring wolf," and the result of the devouring was that the philosopher's stone in the gold (the red Sun) overcomes the wolf and the (golden) "Body [is] rendered fit for the first stage" of the Work. In France, of course, the King was the Capet -- the Red Capet, alchemically? Could the burning of Red Riding Hood's cape, and her devouring by the Grey Wolf, somehow signal the opening of the monarchy for the Perfected Work of Louis XIV, the (Golden) Sun King? A king who, incidentally, sponsored Perrault's revision of the story; concealing the symbols while Making Manifest That Which Should Be Hidden. Is Louis' apocryphal twin a werewolf, from the ancient Arcadian lineage, concealed behind an alchemically-inert [Iron Mask?](#)

"Tonight is the full moon, and the anniversary of that night, years ago, when I made my pact with the wolf goddess of the north."

-- Tanith Lee, "Wolfland"

Or is there a different hidden tradition in Jack Zipes' tale of female empowerment, one in which the original victim at Grandmother's House in the Woods was perhaps, the [Green Hunter](#), the King of the Wood? The Old Woman in the Wood has her own cannibal history, after all, from Baba Yaga to Hansel and Gretel. Is Red Riding Hood, like her Grandmother, a witch? In the Nivernais oral version, the wolf takes the "path of pins" to Grandmother's House (the pins symbolizing the witch-finder's tools pointing the way), and Red Riding Hood even has a cat familiar who tells her of the meal of flesh! In British and Irish folk tradition, witches wore red woven caps or hoods, as did other "outsiders" (such as Jews and witches) in continental France and Germany. Perhaps the story is one of Maiden and Crone, the red cape being the menstrual passage to Womanhood between the two? (And let's hear no reductionist guff about the red hood being a literary invention of Perrault; we're all having too much fun here for such tedia.)

The red cape might also be the moon of the lunar eclipse, reddened, in Slavic myth, by the moon's blood shed when her wolves (the wolves of Diana and Hecate) devoured and darkened her. Or the red cap might symbolize the red cap of the amanita muscaria mushroom, consumed in shamanic initiation rituals -- in which the shaman is burned in a fire, chopped up, devoured, and reborn whole. In that connection, of course, we remember that the [mandrake's](#) effects include hallucinatory shapeshifting -- perhaps our story centers on a hidden rivalry between the mandrake and the mushroom. Imagine two hallucinogenic shamanic traditions battling it out down the ages from the dark woods once upon a time, to the drawing rooms of Louis XIV's France, to the Illuminated battlefields of the Grimm Brothers' Germany. Could this be another echo of the war between the [Benandanti](#) werewolves and the Malandanti witches, fighting a secret war in the fairy tale dreams of children everywhere? My, what a big conspiracy you have, Grandmother . . .

Waiting in Timelines

I have a certain affinity for setting campaigns in the "past." (I put "past" in quotes because it's not limited to historical games; any game with a timeline can begin before the official starting date. I started my *Aberrant* a year before all heck broke loose in its official timeline of 2008.)

When a game is set in the past, you know what's going to happen in the world . . . or, at least, you know what *could* happen in the world. This, in turn, makes it possible to do a lot of neat things, like:

Foreshadowing. If you know what's going to happen and your players don't, you can add a lot of depth to a campaign by dropping hints of what will occur. Being able to drop hints of the coming of the American Civil War (for example) will make that event much more powerful and resonant than simply having a conflict of that magnitude simply arise out of the aether (like happens some meta-plotty campaign worlds).

Of course, sometimes that can be as simple as deciding a probable future, and building towards that. For example, our *Fading Suns* GM Dennis was doing a great job, but he was having a hard time coming up with new ideas. I pointed out that, since the game world was epic in nature by design, that epic-ness could be exemplified by thinking about where the game world might be 10 years from now. The lightbulb went off, and he extrapolated his own personal timeline for the game world. From that point all *kinds* of hints were dropped as to where the world was headed . . . providing that some stalwart heroes didn't intervene, of course.

Sightseeing. If you know what's going to happen, and so do your players, then the opportunity to explore a known timeline can make for a pleasant -- or exciting -- chance to explore the world. Being involved with NASA in 1969, for example, should enable the heroes to be a part of history . . . including the parts they didn't even *know* about. (What nefarious schemes were the James Bond-ian villains planning to thwart the moon landing?) If the players seem interested in this kind of campaign, make sure you give them plenty of opportunities to interact with history . . . preferably without being *too* cheesy. (After all, how much could a hero group consisting of a 60s sitcom show realistically accomplish? . . . Then again, Scooby Doo and the gang met Sonny & Cher, the Harlem Globetrotters, *and* the Batman and Robin!) In this kind of campaign you might even give the players copies of "what's going on/today in history"-type sheets to more fully immerse the players. (My personal recommendation is [20th Century Day by Day](#), but there are many good books that cover similar ground.)

Irony. If you know what's going to happen, and so do your players, and so do their *characters*, then there's the potential for irony. Sam Beckett, the time traveler in *Quantum Leap*, from the far-off future world of the year 1999, was often amused by developments like eight-track tapes, hula-hoops, and big 80s hair. Although this can seem trivial, it *does* emphasize the often alien nature of even recent times. For example, your players may need to smuggle a top-secret floppy disk in a 1980s campaign . . . with over 120k of data!

Long-term stories: If you know the way the world will develop, you can craft some very long-term, epic stories. The movie *Forrest Gump*, for example, uses the backdrop of 30 years of American history to tell its story. This kind of scope is not necessary (although it *is* an interesting challenge for a gaming group!), but even having a story play out slowly over a year or two can make it feel much more real and grandiose than a normal "dude wanders up with a mission" campaign.

Of course, a timeline should always feel like an opportunity, not a straightjacket. While some players may love, say, the idea of traipsing around 1963, others may feel angry at being helpless to prevent the Kennedy assassination. But even then, depending on the campaign, you can throw the players another loop. What if they *can* affect history? If your players have been grumbling about being railroaded by time, imagine the look on their face as they get in a car accident . . . and discover the deceased driver in the other vehicle is one Lee Harvey Oswald. If that doesn't pique your players' interest, check for pulses.

In all, giving your campaign a few years of "breathing space" can often let you develop a world that can grow and change the same way the *real* world does. To paraphrase the curse, we live in interesting times . . . and so do most

heroes.

* * *

John Kovalic has written me to say that *Dork Tower #15* is finished and out the door; he's hopeful that he'll have time to contribute to *Pyramid* again soon.

Regardless, I'm hopeful that I now have a new *Dork Tower* to await at my local comic and game shop . . .

--*Steven Marsh*

* * *

*Last week's answer: **Book of Artifacts** p. 35, for **Advanced Dungeons & Dragons***

(Three stars) "Quick Lard Soap: Helps in removing the foul greasy stuff left upon you by various farme animals. Made of foul greasy stuff from farme animals."

The Rats' Revenge: Part II

An Adventure for *In Nomine*

by Jo Ramsay

The Story so Far

In the [first part of this *In Nomine* scenario](#), PCs were asked to investigate a locked room murder on Earth, with strange rodent connections. Other NPCs with an interest are a mortal Fortean investigator, a faerie noble and his hobgoblin servants, and a demon of nightmares. A Renegade Shedite and the two demons hunting her are also in the area.

In this final part, the murder is explained. The children's home where characters may track down a missing message is described, and the resulting trek into the Marches is detailed.

Additional Encounters on Earth

These are additional optional encounters with the various NPCs for GMs to use.

Bang Bang! Someone's dead!

There is a loud disturbance from the secure wing of the mental hospital. This is caused by Jasper's hair-trigger finger; the Game demon has shot and killed a mortal who he suspected of hosting the Shedite. Unfortunately he was wrong, and it is left to Sedek to cover up the disturbance to "prove his loyalty to Hell." Jasper calmly maintains that he was perfectly correct and stalks off to investigate other suspects. While the other demons don't care about the body count, Sedek would prefer to keep his role intact.

Reed Falls in Love

If PCs encounter Reed, he may fall hopelessly in love with one of them. This is not dependent on the vessel's age, beauty, or placid nature; faerie love is a whimsical thing. The victim of this crush will be subjected to a horrific series of romantic assaults! They will receive anonymous bunches of red roses, chocolates, heartfelt poems, serenades, and offers to take a ride on the back of the yellow Ducati. If he is encouraged, the faerie noble can make himself very helpful to a PC group, even after realizing that they are angels. If spurned, he will pursue vengeance without remorse.

The Real Story

CABLE FAERIES

(aka Faerie Rats, or Cable Rats)

Corporeal Forces - 1	Strength 1	Agility 3
Ethereal Forces - 2	Intelligence 2	Precision 6
Celestial Forces - 1	Will 2	Perception 2

Vessel: Rat/1 (cream-colored fur with reddish muzzle and paws)

Skills: Rat/1 Detect Lies/1, Dodge/3, Engineering/1, Escape/3, Locate Food/4, Knowledge/5 (Cables)

Songs: Dreams (Ethereal/1, Celestial/2), Motion (Celestial/2), Wings/1

Special Abilities: With effort (and the expenditure of 1 Essence), a cable rat can turn a cable into a temporary talisman, allowing it to be taken into the Marches. This is how they take their finds home.

Angels and demons who know about these creatures dismiss them as ethereal vermin. These faerie creatures who take the form of rats are suspected to be a debased modern form of Brownie. They sneak into the corporeal world and carefully retrieve cables, wires, and electrical components. The first sign of a house being infested with cable rats is that electrical leads disappear during the night.

They revenge themselves on mortals who provoke them, but if people treat them well, by offering food, cables, or suitably ethereal music (such as Britney Spears), the rats respond in kind. They may leave gifts of interesting cables or work through the night to mend broken possessions, just as their Brownie forbears would have done. Unfortunately, the rats are faeries and not engineers, and although mended items will be spotlessly clean in the morning, they are just as likely to be broken as they were before.

Faerie nobles use cable rats as messengers, and celestials have also been able to befriend these small spirits, training them to run simple errands or collect cables.

But where do the rats take all the cables that they gather from Earth? They have a nest in the Far Marches, occupied by the King Rat, a terrifying gestalt creature (see below). For decades, the King Rat has been sending its smaller component rats out to collect cables, in order to work on various master projects. Unfortunately, the current project was inspired by dreamscapes of people who were terrified of nuclear war. It's a bomb. The celestial bomb will devastate the Celestial Forces of large numbers of beings . . . if it is ever activated.

Rebellion in the Teind

The rulers of Faerie (see *The Marches*, p. 98) are among the proudest, cruelest, most beautiful, and most hideous of ethereals. They are envied and hated by their ethereal kin, because where other ethereals were slaughtered during Uriel's great crusade, these creatures made a bargain with the devil himself (or at least with Beleth) in return for support and succor. Made up traditionally of two warring courts, the Seelie and the Unseelie make up the two sides of the faerie realm -- rulers of both courts signed the infernal pact, and both courts have prospered. And the price of this treaty? Faerie sends a tithe of subject spirits to Hell each seven years. These slave faeries are subject to the whims and desires of the Princess of Nightmares, and are allowed to live in an area of Her Dark Marches known as the Teind (see *You Are Here*, p. 119).

If there is a leader of the Teind spirits, it is Arawn, an Unseelie noble who was delivered to Beleth in chains as part of the first tithe. And he has plans. From his own cable rat messengers he learned of the King Rat's project. Having reflected on the possibilities, he sent a messenger to Baal.

Arawn's plans to provoke a war in Hell, and has offered Baal a guide to the celestial bomb, in return for the release of the Teind. In order to reach the rats' nest, Baal's troops will have to march through Beleth's Dark Marches, and the Lady of Screams will see such an intrusion as a *casus belli*. Especially if one of her loyal faerie slaves were to intercept a letter from Baal to an unnamed ethereal that gave advance warnings of his plans . . .

Don't Shoot the Messenger

Unfortunately, the messenger rat went missing. It was expected to return from a Tether on Earth, where a private message from Baal was being sent to Arawn, confirming plans to march out into the ethereal realms and capture the bomb. But the rat has not yet returned. Arawn was sufficiently concerned to despatch Reed and the hobgoblins to find the missing rat urgently.

What Happened in Paradise Towers

- **A week ago:** A tame cable rat is given a message on Earth by a demonic Servitor of Baal, and sent to Arawn, who intends to pass the note to Beleth, pretending that he "intercepted" it. On her way back to Paradise Towers (to travel back to the Marches), the rat is injured by a dog and barely escapes with her life. She crawls through the floorboards into the Jacksons' apartment, trailing blood, and hides in a wardrobe. A day later, Lucy finds the rat, and puts her into a spare hamster cage with some warm bedding and fresh food. Forgetting her important mission, the rat curls up and enjoys the attention.
- **Four days ago:** Eddie Jackson comes home drunk, beats up his wife and elder daughter, and threatens to kill the toddler. It is not the first time. Lucy hides in her room, crying, and wishes aloud that her father would just die. The rat listens -- later that night, she chitters a message to the King Rat via Celestial Song of Tongues, calling on the other cable faeries to protect and repay her mortal friend.
- **Three days ago:**
 - *Morning:* Social services pay the Jacksons a visit at 7am, taking the girls away. Lucy hides her rat in her pocket. The girls are later placed temporarily in a childrens' home, pending foster parents being found.
 - *Midnight:* The rats take their revenge. Hundreds of them pour silently into the apartment from the Far Marches, and they attack both of the adults simultaneously, tying their wrists and ankles together tightly with Cat 5 Ethernet cable while they work.
 - Eddie Jackson is pinned down by a carpet of writhing furry bodies and eaten alive. A pillow muffles his screams. Next to him, the cable rats also pin down his wife, but not a hair of her body is harmed. Instead, the blood and entrails of her dead lover splatter across her face and soak into the blankets and sheets of the bed. Used to the screams, neighbors do not give the alert until the next day.
 - The disturbance to the Symphony caused by the murder of a mortal by supernatural entities is heard by a passing Ofanite who relays the news over a CB radio.

The Children's Home

Interesting facts: In order to find the Jackson girls, PCs must get the details of the childrens' home from social services. Typically, this sort of information is not given out lightly, but having authorization from the police will help.

Purpose: PCs will have to come here to find the missing rat. If they don't follow the trail, then eventually NPCs will retrieve the message, setting off events described in "If the Letter Was Found by NPCs."

Description: The Greer Home for Children is housed in a square gray building that was designed in the 1960s. It's a miserable looking place. The kids are a rough lot, and the older children are regularly in trouble with the police for muggings and shoplifting. Staff range from well-meaning and ineffectual to lazy and irresponsible, but are not actively malicious.

Neither Lucy or Amy have left their (shared) room since they arrived, other than to eat or visit the bathroom. If PCs talk to them, the girls are quiet and withdrawn. No-one has yet told them about their father's death and mother's incarceration, and although Lucy is glad to be away from her father, she is homesick. Her little sister doesn't understand what is going on.

If PCs can draw her out, Lucy will eventually swear them to secrecy and tell them about her rat and how she came to find it. The rat itself is dozing happily in her pocket. If PCs try to take the rat away, the girl will burst into tears and wail that her new pet is her best and only friend.

Other encounters: While at the childrens' home, PCs have a chance of running into Reed, who has finally seduced a council worker into checking the files for the childrens' location and/or Sedek and the Game demons, who have learned about the rat from the tortured hobgoblin and Ivy's ramblings.

A Diplomatic Note

Having found the missing rat in the children's home, any PC who handles the creature can make a Perception roll to

detect the relic collar that it is wearing -- no thicker than a human hair. If this hair is taken from Earth into either the Marches or the celestial realms, it will transform into its true form; a thin scroll, bent into the shape of a torc. The scroll is written in Helltongue, and is illegible to angels who do not know the demonic language. The Corporeal Song of Tongues can only translate Earthly languages (of which this is not one), but any redeemed demon will be able to decipher the contents.

The letter reads:

Having received your last missive, We are pleased to accept your conditions for providing scouts to show Our troops the location of the rats' nest in the Far Marches. In return for such aid as results in Our obtaining the alleged device to inform and enable Our Unholy War, We do hereby agree that the Teind shall be disbanded and all ethereal spirits therein released from indenture to the Princess of Nightmares, if they so desire.

We do not expect to be disappointed, either in these ethereal scouts, or in that the game is worth the candle.

Under Our Hand and Seal.

B
(it is sealed with Baal's sigil)

Part II: Of Rats and Men

Introduction: On a Gathering Storm

Having found the strange letter and reported it to Heaven, PCs are rewarded by their Superiors. Generous Superiors might also throw in a minor relic or reliquary, an extra vessel, or a new Servant. Dissonance will be queried, and forgiven. After enjoying a well-deserved couple of days off, PCs are invited to attend a briefing in Blandine's Tower. It is obvious from the solemn atmosphere in the meeting room that the other attendees are high-ranking angels, so it is no surprise when Laurence, Michael, and Blandine enter. The Archangel of Dreams folds her arms and watches serenely as Laurence briefs the assembled angels.

Following receipt of the letter, spies have been sent into Beleth's domain to confirm that demonic armies are heading out into the Far Marches. The spies also confirmed that both Baal and Beleth had troops in the field. Laurence reminds the audience that the Princes of Nightmares and The War are known to be antagonistic to each other, and that a war between them could only benefit Heaven. He also reads out the letter (translated into the angelic tongue), and explains how Baal's secret negotiation to free the Teind might incur Beleth's wrath. Clearly, it is the responsibility of those loyal to Heaven to investigate this rats' nest, find out what Baal was offered by the unknown ethereal, and make sure that the demons can't get it. Fortunately there are Servitors of Heaven who have recently encountered these ethereal rats on Earth and know something of their habits.

All eyes turn to the PCs.

Laurence calls them to the front of the room and formally charges them with a Quest. For the honor of Heaven, they are to secretly travel through the Marches, find the rats' nest, and remove or disable the device mentioned in the letter. Refusal is not an option.

Of course, PCs may have decided to go and investigate the rats' nest without any prompting at all . . .

If the Letter was Found by NPCs

If either the demons or Arawn's messengers retrieved the letter from the missing cable rat before PCs got there, then both PCs and Superiors have less information to work with. PCs are called to another meeting, either in a local Tether (if there is a Tether to Michael or Laurence in the area) or in a run-down hotel room. They are met there by three other celestials, who quickly prove to be the Archangel Michael, one of his Mercurian aide-de-camps, and one of Blandine's senior Malakite honor-guard.

The reason for this meeting is that angelic spies in the Marches have observed movement of demonic troops across Beleth's domain and into the Far Marches. It seems that both Baal and Beleth have troops in motion, and given that they are known to detest each other, it is unlikely that they are simply on a training exercise. A captured ethereal from Beleth's Marches mentioned the "rats' nest" as the cause of these movements. As the PCs are the local experts on these creatures and their habits, they are requested to trek into the Marches, find what they can about the troop movements, and discover why the demons are interested in the cable rats' lair. Needless to say, secrecy is of the utmost importance. Michael comments dryly that there will be plenty of opportunity for heroism later. The Malakite also briefs the PCs on cable faeries, repeating most of the information given above. However, Heaven has no guides who have ever visited the rats' nest in person. For this, PCs are on their own. Characters who are less than totally enthusiastic about the opportunity to sneak behind enemy lines, through hordes of demonic infantry, and into an unknown domain in the Far Marches will be chastized by the Archangel, who claims that he only wishes he could go himself. This is of course absolutely true.

The Road Less Travelled

Travelling through the Marches poses some problems for PCs. While Blandine will assign a Cherub to guide them into the Far Marches on request, no angel knows where the rats' nest is located. The easiest way to find it is either to tag a cable rat and follow it home, or to head toward where the spies reported the armies, and hope to capture either a demon or ethereal who knows the way.

It is simple for a celestial to create a disguise in the Ethereal Realms; usually they will appear as the image of their most recent vessel, but they can change this appearance with a successful Will roll.

The trek is arduous, and involving all types of exotic terrain, with associated problems (whispering deserts, a road paved with teeth, rafting down a river of tears). As PCs head away from the Vale of Dreams and out into the Far Marches, the geography gets stranger, and the Earthly laws of Physics are regularly bent or broken. The sky is as likely to be red as it is to be blue, a straight line may not be the shortest route between two points, and concentrating hard on where you want to go (with a successful Will roll) is a more accurate form of navigation than any compass.

Combat in the Marches

In the Ethereal realm, characters can choose whether to engage in ethereal or celestial combat (corporeal combat is not an option). Ethereal combat may involve Songs that are specifically stated as causing mind hits, Songs of Dreams, or the Dreamwalking attunement. Many Corporeal Songs do not function in the Marches, and it is down to the GMs discretion to decide which Songs should work there. It is also possible to simply assault an opponent directly, using force of Will to maintain a weapon that will function in the ethereal realm -- this defaults to an ethereal attack. Combat of this type in the Marches is calculated similarly to corporeal combat, substituting Intelligence for Strength and Precision for Agility. Damage is taken as mind hits instead of body hits. Damage is calculated as if combat was unarmed, but the use of "ethereal weapons" allows an attacker to use a weapon skill to attack, rather than Fighting.

Celestials, ethereals, and humans who can control their Essence expenditure can also choose to engage in celestial combat in the Marches. Due to the dangers of losing Forces, celestial combat is relatively unusual in the ethereal realm.

Optional Encounters

These are optional encounters. There are extra ideas for locations in the Marches and ethereal NPCs in *You Are Here*, and the *Liber Servitorum*.

The Black Knight

As PCs stumble down a mountain trail, they see a narrow chasm between two cliff-faces ahead of them. The ledge on the PCs' side of the precipice is buffeted by high winds, enough to make flying a tricky proposition at best. A sturdy wooden post is fixed to the ground by the cliff's edge, with a brass bugle attached to it.

As soon as one of the PCs blows a note on the bugle, the ground begins to shake and the sound of horses' hooves can be heard. As if out of nowhere, a knight in matt-black armor rides out from the far side of the chasm. A translucent bridge appears under his horse as he approaches; it curves in a delicate arc and has no supports. When the knight reaches the middle of the bridge, he calls out to the PCs and tells them that he has vowed that only those pure in heart and strong in faith shall pass.

The knight is a Malakite of Uriel, one of the infamous Tsayadim who deliberately left Heaven after their Master was recalled, becoming Outcasts rather than swear allegiance to any other Word than Purity. He interrogates PCs at length about any recent deeds (or misdeeds), accusing each one of whichever impurities he can detect with his resonance. His accusations become wilder and wilder, and it is clear that the black knight has no intention of letting anybody cross the chasm. If pressed on this point, he will invite the PCs to select a champion to fight him, swearing that if he is defeated in ethereal combat then the party may pass.

After the knight's defeat, the bridge shimmers and then disappears as if it had never existed. The knight's shield now displays Uriel's sigil in silver on a red background. If defeated in single combat, he attempts to answer any questions the PCs wish to ask him -- except for how to traverse the bridge. He then mounts up and rides off.

In order to cross the chasm, PCs must have faith. If a character gathers his courage and steps out into the void, the bridge miraculously appears under his feet, supporting him until he reaches the other side. If characters fail to defeat the knight then he rides back onto the bridge; they will have to retrace their steps and find another way around.

THE BLACK KNIGHT

Outcast Malakite of Uriel

Corporeal Forces - 2	Strength 2	Agility 6
Ethereal Forces - 4	Intelligence 8	Precision 8
Celestial Forces - 4	Will 8	Perception 8

Skills: Detect Lies/1, Dodge/4, Fighting/2, Knowledge/5 (Butchering Ethereals), Large Weapon (Lance/3, Sword/5), Riding/3

Songs: Entropy (Ethereal/4, Celestial/2), Light (Celestial/2), Tongue/5

Discord: Aura/2

Servant: His horse is a 4-Force ethereal. The Black Knight has convinced himself that it was sent to serve him, and has weaned it off human flesh . . . mostly. This tolerance of an ethereal has earned him the Discord.

Pool of Futility

A pool of dark, muddied water ringed with empty beer cans and urban waste. Many footprints lead towards it. PCs who peer into the pool must make a Will roll. If the roll is successful, the pool will show them an accurate view of whichever location they currently have in mind, in any realm. If the Will roll is failed, then the pool will show them a nightmare vision of the places or people they most love suffering terrible tragedies. Often these dark images will strongly suggest that the PC abandon his current quest and go back to help. A mortal friend might be shown in an

intensive care hospital bed, whispering the character's name, or a favorite apartment might be shown being burgled and set on fire by hated enemies.

Behind Enemy Lines

As PCs approach the rats' nest, they find signs of the demonic armies who are encamped to either side. Terrain becomes swampy, broken up by thickets of tentacled trees that ooze blood when scratched. Periodically, dense gray mists emanate from the swamp, hiding everything from view. Wide trails of footprints are trampled through the ground, and flocks of ethereal carrion birds occupy every available perching space. Wings of demonic scouts soar across the patchwork skies overhead and there are also wide patrols on the ground to be avoided.

The demons each alter their appearances in the Marches to become as intimidating as possible, and it is difficult to identify an individual's Band or allegiance by sight. There are currently no battles in progress, the armies are standing by and waiting for further instructions. Beleth's troops have tattered banners flying, and nightmare-handlers standing guard with manticores and cthulhoid horrors leashed on silver chains. Baal's troops are smartly uniformed, more disciplined, and have brought some tanks along to the party.

Anyone with tactical skill who attempts to survey the two forces will spot that Beleth's ragtag army has a clear advantage, in numbers as well as terrain. Knowing Baal's reputation as a general, this implies that his troops are intended to act merely as a diversion.

If PCs are stealthy, the first contact will occur when they hear screams and laughter in the distance. Investigation shows that a group of Beleth's demons have trapped a gangly Impudite who went going AWOL from Baal's ranks. In the absence of any other orders, they have decided to torture her by crucifying her upside down. It relieves the boredom. Spying on the conversation shows that the armies are currently waiting for orders, and that there are rumors that both Princes will be showing up in person to direct their forces. If the Impudite is rescued, she is more than willing to strike a deal with her saviors in return for a clean getaway. She has heard the rumors that Baal's strike force are disposable cannon fodder, here to present a diversion while the real strike team sneak into the nest and grab the bomb. She believes this to be true, which is why she is trying to go quietly AWOL.

By pretending to be either demons or ethereals, PCs will be able to sneak through either of the battle-lines -- they will have an marginally easier time with Beleth's troops, who are less disciplined but more casually sadistic. As well as the usual gossip that Baal wears womens' underwear, Beleth sings country music in the bath, and that the other side are afraid of the dark, PCs may overhear rumors about the rats' nest and what lies within it. These include the existence of a king rat, a terrifying Godzilla creature who is as powerful as a Superior. The mists provide an ideal cover for brave angels to sneak past the soldiers to the cable rats' nest.

The Rat's Nest

The rats' nest bears a strong resemblance to a giant ball of wool, as large as a tower block, made of woven metallic wires. It can be easily seen from any vantage point (such as a tree) that rises above the camps.

On reaching the nest, PCs will be able to clamber inside through any of the many holes leading inwards. The interior is a maze of tunnels and crawlways, and the whole edifice feels like an artifact to anyone who makes a successful Perception roll. Any different types of cables are woven into the walls, and a wide variety of technical devices, both old and new, have been retrieved by the rats and built into the nest. The nest is lit by an eclectic array of lighting equipment, and after a few minutes, PCs begin to notice the cable rats themselves. The creatures are nervous, and are hiding in the walls, where only their pink eyes are visible.

The King Rat lives in the very center of the nest, in a huge hollowed out chamber. The bomb is in another secret room, which any cable rat can locate. Also in the nest are five of Baal's SMS (Special Marches Squad) elite commandos -- their mission: to locate and capture the device, using as much force as is necessary without drawing Beleth's attention. The demons spent several hours trying to find the center of the nest, and have now regrouped with a subtle new plan.

They will just hack their way through, destroying all cable rats they can find, because destroying ethereals in the Marches makes no disturbance.

The King Rat is a large creature of fiendish intellect, who enjoys chess, witty conversation, building impossible devices of ultimate doom, and protecting its rat subjects. It is a faerie noble, and if approached with the proper amount of respect, it will barter for the bomb; as far as the King is concerned, the device stopped being interesting after it was completed.

If the PCs do not encounter the demons before they begin their hack and slay approach, they will find that the tunnels in the nest twist around suddenly, so as to all lead into the nest's center. There the King Rat waits to defend its home from all intruders; the demons have already stumbled into the King's lair and are attempting to assault it.

If any Superiors are summoned, there will be trouble. Both Baal and Beleth are taking a personal interest in the affair, and both of them will respond to any enemy Superiors by turning up in person. An animated three-way argument is likely to ensue, during which sensible PCs could escape with the fleeing cable rats.

NPC Stats in the Rats' Nest

COMMANDO SMS DEMON

Servitor of Baal

Corporeal Forces - 1 Strength 2 Agility 2
Ethereal Forces - 4 Intelligence 8 Precision 8
Celestial Forces - 5 Will 10 Perception 10

Skills: Dodge/3, Large Weapon/1 (Sword), Move Silently/2, Ranged Weapon/3 (SMG), Small Weapon/4 (Knife), Survival/4 (Marches), Tracking/3, (the leader also has Tactics/4)

Songs: Dreams (All/4), Healing (Ethereal/2)

Discord (for Calabim): Murderous/3

Attunement: Appropriate Band Attunement of The War. The leader also has the Art of War.

Artifact: Unholy sub-machine gun or flaming combat knife

KING RAT

Ethereal Faerie Lord

Corporeal Forces - 0 Strength 1 Agility 1
Ethereal Forces - 6 Intelligence 12 Precision 12
Celestial Forces - 6 Will 12 Perception 12

Skills: Dodge/6, Engineering/5, Fighting/6, Savoir Faire/2, Tactics/4

Songs: Charm (All/3), Entropy (Ethereal/3), Harmony (Ethereal/4, Celestial/4), Motion (Ethereal/2, Celestial/6)

The King Rat can also attack with its tail as if it had Numinous Corpus (Tail/5), and summon hundreds of smaller cable rats to help defend the nest.

How I Learned to Love the Bomb

The bomb is a gleaming metal sheath, studded with flashing lights and clever control systems. It is also a living relic

(see *Liber Reliquarum*, p. 104) with enough intelligence to carry out conversations, and it is a coward -- the bomb understands that it will cease to exist if it explodes, so it has no intention of doing so. PCs (or NPCs) are welcome to try to persuade it otherwise . . .

It is not the only relic in the rats' secret room; there are also any number of abandoned master projects that the rats have attempted in the past. While some may still work, the majority are now rusted and forgotten.

Designer's Notes: GURPS Monsters

by Hunter Johnson

I had a few revisions under my belt (*GURPS Japan*, *GURPS Bestiary*) when I hashed out what would go into the book originally envisioned as *GURPS Horror Bestiary*. I felt that a horror bestiary in the same style as *GURPS Fantasy Bestiary* or *GURPS Space Bestiary* would feel too much like *GURPS Creatures of the Night*. The vision of the book morphed along the way, settling finally on a *GURPS Villains* style -- individual monsters in fine detail.

The original plan also included the idea that the monsters should be divided into ten chapters. Those ten chapters would correspond to the sections in the monsters chapter of the new edition of *GURPS Horror*. Two things lead to the current division (four chapters, corresponding to the origins of the creatures): diverging schedules for the two books, and the fact that more monsters can be included if there are fewer chapter splash pages.

With the vision and outline in place (but subject to change), the remaining hurdle was to get submissions that fit both the vision and the outline. Conveying that *GURPS Monsters* was not going to be a catalog of creatures nor a clearinghouse for mundane villains was a bit of a problem, it turns out. Now, some exceptions were made in the final product (the Phantom of the Opera is not unnatural, but he was included as a classic movie "monster") and some submissions were sent back to the submitters with suggestions to make them fit (Tamok the Conqueror was originally a race a creatures, not an individual from that race), but some of the good characters that were submitted would have been wrecked by shoehorning them into this book's vision.

Happily, the designer's notes feature here in *Pyramid* has a long and glorious tradition of providing an outlet for such things. Bill Stoddard sent in this monstrous creature, which was eventually cut because she is wholly natural, as scary as that may be. It went through the playtesting process, but the changes from the original submission were only cosmetic in nature.

Asuri Ranees

Total Points: 257

Age 9; 8' long; 410 lbs.; a tiger of moderate size but with an intimidating air of fierceness.

Racial Package: Tiger [172].

ST: 35 [0]; **DX:** 16 [20]; **IQ:** 6 [20]; **HT:** 20/25 [60]

Advantages: Animal Empathy [5]; Chameleon (only in natural cover, -20%) 1 [6]; Charisma +1 [5]; Reputation +1 (Cunning predator, most people/most of the jungle, all the time) [3]; Single-Minded [5].

Disadvantages: Bad Temper [-10]; Enemy (Sir Roderick Jameson, on a 6 or less) [-5]; Migraine (Mild) [-5]; Odious Personal Habit (Man-Eater) [-15]; Reputation -4 (as a Man-Eating Tiger, in India, on a 7 or less) [-6]; Sadism [-15].

Quirks: Afraid of fire; Really likes fish. [-2]

Skills: Area Knowledge (Jungles of the Himalayan foothills)-10 [8]; Fishing-8 [4]; Tracking-18 [2].

Notes: Asuri Ranees's Migraine disadvantage actually represents recurrent toothaches; during one of these toothaches she is likely to attack unpredictably. It was during the aftermath of such an attack that she developed a taste for human flesh. Her Sadism is the common feline trait "plays with her food" in exaggerated form.

Asuri Ranees ("the devil queen") is an Indian tiger and the dominant predator of her particular jungle. She has an extraordinarily good constitution and has lived to an unusual age. She was above average in cunning to start with and

has grown more so with the years. Her depredations have so terrified the nearby villagers that she is widely considered to be a demon in the guise of a beast, the source of her name. More than one hunter has failed to kill her.

Asuri Ranees motives are quite straightforward: she wants to eat regularly, preferably meals such as fish or human flesh; she wants to hold her territory against other tigers; and, occasionally, she wants to mate and raise cubs. But her strategies for accomplishing these are unusually sophisticated; as an NPC, play her with exceptional Craftiness (p. BE84). She is certainly clever enough to circle back and approach an unwary hunter from behind. If she is among trees, her stripes give her +2 to Stealth if still, +1 if moving. Her tactics are the classic tiger technique of leaping from concealment to seize the neck (p. BE79) and snap it (p. CI170). If this doesn't work, she will switch to raking attacks with her back legs to disembowel her prey.

As happens to cats, her teeth are going bad and occasionally cause her pain, which makes her restless and irritable. When this happens, she is dangerously unpredictable, likely to respond to any challenge or threat with a direct attack. This is a weakness that could get her killed, but it has cost the lives of a few hunters who weren't prepared for her speed and ferocity. She can sprint a quarter mile in just over 30 seconds. Her HT is high enough so that it will take more than one shot to finish her off.

Sir Roderick Jameson has made a name for himself killing man-eaters around the world. He has been trying to add Asuri's pelt to his collection for three years. She has killed two of his crew since he started, the first fatalities in all of his hunts. His quest may be turning into an obsession...

Racial Package

Tiger

172 points

Attributes: Enhanced ST +25 (No Fine Manipulators) [107]; DX +4 [45]; IQ -6 [-50]; HT +5 [60].

Advantages: Alertness +14 [70]; Attractive [5]; Claws [15]; Combat Reflexes [15]; Double-Jointed [5]; Enhanced Move +50% [5]; ; Extra Hit Points +5 [25]; Fuzzy Sense (3-hex range, -20%) [8]; Four Legs [5]; Longevity [5]; Night Vision [10]; Sharp Teeth [5]; Silence x3 [15]; Thick Fur [29].

Disadvantages: Attentive [-1]; Bestial [-10]; Dead Broke [-25]; Dull [- 1]; Horizontal [-10]; Innumerate [-5]; Mute [-25]; No Fine Manipulators [-30]; Presentient [-20]; Short Arms [-10]; Short Lifespan x5 [-50]; Sleepy (50%) [-10]; Social Stigma (Barbarian) [- 15]; Staid [-1]; Stubbornness [-5].

Skills: Climbing at DX [2]; Jumping at DX [1]; Stealth at DX [2]; Survival (Jungle, specialized) at IQ+2/+8 [8]; Swimming at DX [1].

Maneuver: Neck Snap at ST-2 [2].

Other Places and Times

Tigers are widespread geographically and formerly were even more so. Adventurers in a variety of lands might encounter Asuri Ranees under a suitable local name. For example, a Japanese tiger might plausibly be called Mononoke Hime (angry ghost princess).

In the Stone Age

With a few changes to her racial template, Asuri Ranees could become a sabertooth or smilodon (see p. BE54 or D76) and the nemesis of a band of early hominids. The hunt that finally rids the tribe of her might be a suitable epic adventure, or the occasional seizure of a relative could provide a sense of Paleolithic horror.

For the sabertooth package, reduce Enhanced ST to +16 [90] and buy Sharp Teeth up to Fangs [10]. The skill of Swimming and the Neck Snap maneuver can be dropped, for a net -15 point cost.

Avatar

In an Indian campaign, especially one set in ancient India, Asuri Raneer may be literally what her name implies, a demonic enemy of the gods walking the earth in tiger form. This version could have even higher IQ and the ability to speak Sanskrit; other supernatural powers would be appropriate as well, especially if her human enemy were an avatar of one or another god. Consider making her Unaging [15] or even giving her Immortality [140].

Alien

Certain biological designs are highly efficient for certain survival strategies and thus likely to evolve independently in different lineages. In an outer space campaign, some other planet's evolutionary history might have turned up its own huge feline predators who would view human explorers as an intriguing new source of meat. The creatures might be almost identical to earthly tigers or might have exotic powers, as in Van Vogt's classic "Black Destroyer."

* * *

And here's one from David Morgan-Mar, lying somewhere between the Cryptozoo and Original Monsters.

The Bunyip

Total Points: 284

A huge brawny man with a bestial appearance. He is 6'7" tall, but stooped over somewhat, with a heavy frame filled out more with muscle than fat. His matted brown hair and beard are unkempt and he has a wild animal glow to his green eyes. He is unnaturally hairy and his uncut nails have hardened into short claws. He wears ragged clothing, scavenged from his victims.

ST: 20 [110]; **DX:** 13 [30]; **IQ:** 8 [-15]; **HT:** 14 [45].

Advantages: Alertness +6 [30]; Cast Iron Stomach [15]; Claws [15]; Combat Reflexes [15]; Damage Resistance +4 [12]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Immunity to Disease [10]; Patron (Bunyip Dreaming, powerful individual with special powers, almost all the time) [60]; Penetrating Call [5]; Very Rapid Healing [15].

Disadvantages: Bloodlust [-10]; Dead Broke [-25]; Delusion (I am a bunyip) [-15]; Illiteracy [-10]; Lecherousness [-15]; Odious Personal Habit (Eats Humans) [-15]; Reputation -3 (fearsome beast, to people of nearby town all the time) [-5]; Secret (Murderer) [-30]; Status -3 [-15]; Ugly [-10]; Uneducated [-5].

Quirks: Doesn't know his own strength [-1].

Skills: Brawling-18 [24]; Pickpocket-12 [2]; Riding-12 [1]; Scrounging-9 [2]; Stealth-18 [32]; Streetwise-9 [4]; Survival (Woodlands)-16 [18].

Languages: English (native)-8 [0].

The Bunyip Dreaming

The Bunyip Dreaming which serves as Dan's patron is a powerful spirit entity, built on the Spirit of Place template in *GURPS Spirits* (p. SPI61). It keeps its Water Breathing and Swim spells permanently on Dan.

Bunyip Dreaming

Total Points: 271

Attributes: ST 10 [0]; DX 10 [0]; IQ 8 [-15]; HT 16 [80].

Advantages: Innate Magic: Water Breathing-16 [18]; Innate Magic: Swim-16 [18]; Magery 1 (Innate Magic Only) [8]; Spirit of Place [182].

Disadvantages: Bestial [-10]; Bloodlust [-10].

Biography

As a youngster, Dan Saunders was a societal misfit in colonial Australia. An orphan who found himself on the streets of Victorian-era Sydney, he spent a tough childhood picking pockets and eating scraps or whatever he could steal from markets. By necessity, he developed a taste for raw meat. He spent several years living this way, on the edges of society and out of sight of most people.

Reaching adulthood, Saunders developed an appreciation for female company. An attempted abduction of a young woman went wrong and Saunders killed her without realizing his overpowering strength. Fearing capture (and the gallows), he stole a horse and fled the city for the relative safety of the bush.

Saunders rode for several days, bypassing towns he came across. Eventually, at a billabong by the road, his hunger got the better of him and he killed and ate the horse. A few days later he ambushed his first human prey. He carved a leg bone into a snorkel and used it to lie in wait underwater for future ambushes. Before long, the road became notorious for the disappearances but, being the only road between two large towns, traffic never died down enough to bother Dan. He especially enjoyed catching young women, at first for their company but later just for the taste of their flesh.

Over time, a local bunyip Dreaming has become attached to Saunders because of the sympathetic activities he pursues. This malicious spirit grants him unnatural strength and bloodthirstiness, at the cost of slowly making him less human. His urban survival skills are being replaced by more bestial ones. In his mind, Saunders is now a bunyip, the local settlers and Aborigines refer to him as one, and to all intents and purposes he is one.

Motivations

Saunders is now motivated almost completely by two desires: food and women. He attempts to ravish any women he captures, but before he gets the chance most are dead of wounds or pure shock, at which point they become simply food. Saunders retains a knowledge of English, and if any potential victims think to speak to him he may hesitate as the human and bunyip within him compete for control. He is not entirely given over to his monstrous side yet, and he could possibly be lured back to society with promises of all the things he never had as a child. It is unlikely that anyone would think to offer such things though, and any glimpse of humanity in Saunders should serve merely to highlight the horror of his corruption.

Encountered

Typically, Saunders will be encountered by weary travelers stopping along the road for water. The first person to approach the billabong will be dragged in and quickly dispatched. If young ladies are present in the traveling party, Saunders will leap out to drag one away, otherwise he will probably lie hidden with his prize.

If enough people go missing, authorities may be called in to investigate. Local Aborigines will warn of the impossibility of capturing or killing a bunyip. An armed force may scare Saunders into hiding, or force him to adopt stealth raid tactics on camps, increasing any tension. If actually captured alive, the "wild man" will create a sensation. He may be transported back to Sydney for study, where all hell will break loose when he inevitably escapes.

Another possibility is that eventually Dan's billabong becomes so shunned that he has to move on. The trail of

destruction as he crosses the countryside should be enough to scare local farmers witless and present a golden opportunity for brave young souls seeking their fortune. Note that with his animal stealth and human cunning, Dan will not be easy prey for anyone with a gun.

Variations

Since bunyip Dreamings are immortal and society will always produce dregs like Dan, he can easily be moved forward as far as the present day or even beyond to a fantastic Cyberpunk world. Dreamings are usually attached to an area of land, but if one somehow gets stranded on a ship bound for London it will find plenty of people like Dan to infect. In a non- Australian setting, Saunders could be possessed by any local variety of a malignant spirit, slowly sapping what remains of his humanity as he terrorizes the locals. In a fantasy campaign, rumors of a local troll lurking under a bridge and eating passers-by could turn up a version of the bunyip, recognizable as a man missing from the local village and now corrupted by magical or spiritual forces.

What is a Bunyip?

Bunyips are traditional creatures of Australian Aboriginal legend. They are large, fierce, and semi-aquatic, living in creeks, swamps, and billabongs (from an Aboriginal word meaning a waterhole). Physical descriptions are as varied as the many Aboriginal tribes -- bunyips are described as either scaled or furry, horned or not, tailed or not, having clawed or webbed feet, and being anywhere from human- to elephant-sized. What they have in common is a fearsome, spine-chilling call and an appetite for humans, especially young women.

These legends were truly believed by the Aborigines, not treated merely as stories to scare children. When Europeans arrived, Aborigines told them of bunyips as fact, resulting in many superstitious and uncertain settlers spreading wild stories based on weird sounds heard in the bush. To tradition-minded Aborigines, even if bunyips have died out in modern times their spirits still exist as bunyip Dreamings, capable of interacting with people who invoke them through rituals.

What were Bunyips?

Paleontological evidence shows that megafauna populated Australia recently enough to have co-existed with Aborigines. Two examples are Megalania, a 23-foot lizard, and Diprotodon, a two-ton marsupial resembling a rhinoceros-sized wombat. Both of these have been suggested as the source of bunyip legends. Another theory has been proposed for more recent bunyip reports: Down-and-outs in colonial times and as recently as the Great Depression may have taken to ambushing people by hiding in shallow water with breathing tubes, resulting in spates of disappearances at local waterholes. A fondness of lonely men for female companionship is blamed for the tendency for victims to be women.

The *Miscellanea*

by Damien Wellman

The *Assorted Charts. Etc. of Various Traditions of Occultism*, otherwise known as the *Miscellanea*, is a prized collector's item to those who deal in occult and hidden knowledge. Consisting of a dozen thick black three-ring binders, each stuffed with papers, the *Miscellanea* is exactly what it claims to be: an assortment of many charts, monographs, essays, and copies of writings ancient and modern from many cultures, ranging from pop-culture astrological fluff to serious and scholarly works on obscure magical practices.

If only it had an index.

The *Miscellanea* is organized neatly and thoroughly, if very eccentrically -- the information is sorted by the original geographic origin of the tradition from which it sprang. Or at least, that's the best guess, as the position of some works within the collection conflict with common knowledge. This will cause much confusion to the unwary as there is no table of contents, index, or other clarifying aid, but the collection is organized well enough that reference is only fairly difficult after some study, as opposed to impossible.

Aside from its value as a reference work once mastered, the *Miscellanea* is valued for containing copies of works long thought to be lost. The quality of these copies widely vary, from neatly handwritten manuscripts to blurry photocopies of centuries-old parchments, but the *Miscellanea* is a treasure trove of information for those interested in occultism, albeit incomplete and spotty.

In a game with working magic of some kind, the *Assorted Charts* will divulge very little new information to a novice as even the copies of "lost" works require a thorough grounding in the basics of the tradition. The *Miscellanea* is the notebook of a completist, not a primer. For those who already somewhat adept, the *Miscellanea* can provide new insights and angles of thought not previously considered, allowing a better synthesis of what is already known.

In game terms, one cannot learn new skills from reading the collection, but study will help someone who already has at least the basic skill advance in what they already know, and anyone consulting the appropriate information in the *Miscellanea* on a question should be given a significant bonus to a skill roll at the cost of taking longer to try, thanks to the eccentric organization of the collection.

Alternate Versions

It's possible that the *Miscellanea* itself possesses magical power. A benevolent compiler might have added magics that aid what's already present, allowing a student to swiftly build on existing knowledge. A darker *Miscellanea* might only have such a variety of knowledge due to stealing it from the minds of those who read it, explaining why it contains so much information not available elsewhere.

The *Miscellanea* doesn't **have** to be magical in origin, of course. It could simply be an extremely comprehensive collection of scientific papers and notes, different from similar professional works in mysteriously containing information that is considered classified or a trade secret. Anything from the real formula for Coca-Cola to how to build a perfectly safe fusion reactor could be found within. In a game with *Weird Science*, the *Miscellanea* could be a collection of many disparate theories, perhaps updated periodically by the current owner, reflecting their biases -- this would make for a *Miscellanea* that is quite vague on certain subjects. In a *Mage: The Ascension* game, there could *several* collections of this type, each different and mutually contradictory!

For that matter, who is the compiler, and what was their motive? Is the *Miscellanea* a simple working manual? A hoax? Was the compiler trying to nobly collect far-flung knowledge into one place, or were they greedily copying and destroying other rare artifacts? All of these are possible answers when you place these books into your game.

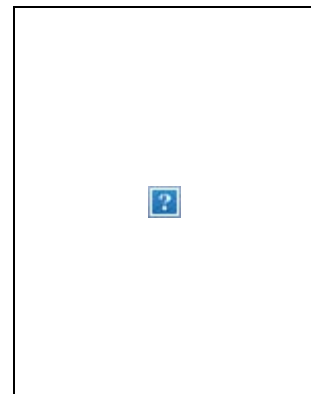
Pyramid Review

Oriental Adventures (for D&D)

Published by [Wizards of the Coast](#)

Written by James Wyatt

256 color pages; \$34.95



Okay, I have a special confession to make: *Oriental Adventures* was the first roleplaying book I ever purchased. I'm speaking, naturally, of the first edition of the book published back in the day for *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons*. I was only twelve years old and had just been exposed to this cool new game that an old friend had showed me. At the time I didn't have any of the core books or even anyone to play with. But the book set my imagination alive nonetheless. I would page through it every day, memorizing stats and creating characters that I played only in my mind.

A while later I got to actually play the game, and I learned to appreciate what a great book it really was . . . and what a wise purchase I'd made that day. So now, years later, after *Dungeons & Dragons* had just seen its third incarnation, I was quite interested when it was announced that *Oriental Adventures* would be re-released for *3rd Edition*. Needless to say, the game shop was my first destination on my way home from work a short while ago when the book hit the shelves. And paging through this new edition, only one question is running through my mind: will this new book set my imagination on fire as its predecessor did so many years ago?

Well, there are a lot of differences this time. The book has gone from a 144-page black and white text to one that's 256 pages and full color. A lot has changed since those old days. *D&D* has grown by leaps and bounds, and this book will have to be a lot more to a lot more readers. The average gamer probably knows at least a little bit more about Asian culture than the average gamer did fifteen years ago. And since then there have been a bunch of games published with Asian or at least Asian-inspired settings, so the new book will have some competition. Will it stack up?

After reading it through, I'd have to say I think so. The book brings back a lot of the old material from the first edition, but it expands that material greatly and adds a lot to it. The first big change is that the old realm of Kara-Tur is dumped, and Rokugan is inserted as the "optional but default" setting. This setting is the very same as that of the *Legend of the Five Rings* series. Being that I've never taken a big interest in *L5R* I'm a bit indifferent to the news, but many gamers are certain to be happy for it, and at the very least it's good to see *Oriental Adventures* published alongside a sound established setting.

Reading through, one of the first differences is that there are more races. We have the old korobokuru, hengeyokai, spirit folk, and human mix, but now we have nezumi, which are drawn from *L5R*, and the vanara, which are based on the followers of Hanuman in the Indian epic *The Ramayana*. For those who didn't read the old edition of *Oriental Adventures*, the korobokuru are more or less a race of barbarian dwarves, the hengeyokai are a race of shape-shifters, and the spirit folk are like humans but very in touch with the spirit realm. The nezumi are a race of bipedal rats who are among the only races able to survive in the Shadowlands without suffering its taint (we're talking *L5R* here), and the vanara are a race of curious bipedal apes. All told, the translations are decent. The hengeyokai with their shape-shifting abilities are the hardest to balance out with the others, and even they are given fair treatment (by means of a level adjustment, just like playing monsters out of the *Monster Manual*).

All of the classes from the old edition are present (although a few as prestige classes), and they are even expanded upon. In *Oriental Adventures* one can be a barbarian, a fighter, a monk, a ranger, a rogue, a samurai, a shaman, a shugenja, a sohei, a sorcerer, or a wu jen. The barbarian, fighter, monk, ranger, rogue, and sorcerers are translated

from the *Player's Handbook* with few changes (and no reprinting, although the author does discuss each individually and how it translates into the game). The only major change among them are some minor skill and feat changes and the fact that monks can freely multiclass in *Oriental Adventures*.

Samurai are presented with a separate class (no need to worry about that prestige class presented in *Sword and Fist*) that is pretty fairly developed, although they don't get insane game rule abilities or bonuses. The fun of playing a samurai comes more in the roleplaying than in min-maxing the rules with them. Sohei are warrior monks who spend most of their time defending temples and the like; game-wise they're a lot like paladins, with monk-like special abilities and spell casting powers. Wu jen are very much akin to wizards, except with more of an elemental bent, from which they can get bonuses for mastering a single element. There are no clerics in *Oriental Adventures*, but there are two cleric-like classes (well, divine spellcasters at least). The first is the shaman, and they're basically intermediaries between the human realm and the spirit realm (a major theme in an Asian campaign). The shengenja are nobles like the samurai, but with elemental spellcasting powers. Overall they come off more like a cross between clerics and wizards than just elemental clerics; this being the result of the fact that they are the primary spellcasters in the Rokugan setting and thus must strike that balance.

Most of the core classes are kept pretty basic, as they are in the *Player's Handbook*, and the really meaty stuff is in with the prestige classes. There are seventeen of them (plus a few tucked in the back), and they are a dynamic mix that is bound to see a lot of play. There are several classes of elite monks, several shape-shifting classes, and a bunch of the prototypical warriors of Asian legend, such as the elusive ninja or the kensei weapon masters. All told, the prestige classes are about standard for what Wizards of the Coast has been putting out. There are those that feel that the prestige classes are cheesy and unbalanced, and they won't be disappointed. But the folks who love the prestige classes won't be disappointed either. There's a lot of material in there that will make for all kinds of game play.

There is only one new skill added -- Iaijutsu Focus, which is the art of quick draw and can allow for extra damage on an attack. Rules for Iaijutsu duels are also added later, enabling players to reenact the duels of the legendary masters, where the first blow is often the only blow. There are a whole bunch of new feats added, though. Most of them are martial arts-style combat feats and ancestor feats, a product of the Rokugan setting (basically, a person with an ancestor feat gets some sort of special bonus for having a certain ancestor -- all of whom are NPCs tied to the Rokugan setting).

One of the things left out of this edition, and which some gamers are surely going to miss, is a point system for keeping track of honor. Instead the author simply gives us several abstract levels of honor, which a character might obtain. It becomes more of a roleplaying issue than a game rule one. Now some are bound to gripe about this, as the old honor point system was pretty neat and added a certain level of challenge to the game. I, for one, know that I would liked to have had it kept in, although in the end the abstract system certainly does make for smoother game play.

Although one might expect it, there aren't a whole bunch of new combat rules for handling martial arts and the like. The developers are pretty happy with the current system that throws martial arts moves in with feats. I've never been a fan of that system, as it's too limited to encompass what a martial artist can really do, but, again, the author has gone for what is simplest and flows the easiest instead of creating a bunch of clunky tack-on rules. One thing that was added was martial arts "forms." These are basically lists of martial arts moves (feats), and when one completes the list they get some sort of bonus move. I have to admit that these bonus moves are far more lackluster than they could be. When one thinks of a martial arts master, they think of something exciting, and it would have been nice to see some sort of really exciting move that the warrior gets for completing his training -- you know, that super secret move that only the grand master knows. Instead, the master just gets some sort of bonus that, while useful, isn't terribly exciting.

The spells section is great. This edition brings back a lot of the old spells from the first edition and adds a bunch new to it, such as spells mostly for Rokugan, as well as even spells out of *Dragon Fist*, a game of Hong Kong wuxia martial arts action that only saw release in PDF format. What's really so great about them is that they are so open for use in just about any campaign. Many have some sort of Asian flavor to them, but what we're really getting is just another batch of new spells that are on par with what we got in the *Player's Handbook*. The same goes for the magic items. Most have an Asian theme, but most of the special abilities and effects are readily deportable into any setting without throwing things off. My only gripe with the items is that I would like to have seen more of them.

The monsters section is quite thick, something that's a real bonus, as being shortchanged on monsters leaves players bored of fighting the same stuff. The mix here explores most of the prototypical Asian monsters that we usually see translated into RPGs, such as the kappa, the ki-rin, the tengu (always a favorite of mine), and the vile oni. It's split fairly evenly between adversaries for a standard *Oriental Adventures* campaign and those which are primarily for a Rokugan campaign, although most of it could truly be adapted to either. As far as development goes, the monsters seem pretty fair. There aren't any super-monsters that are going to throw things off, and most are balanced right about where they should be power-wise.

The section on world-building is very cursory and leads to a serious gripe with the book. One of the things that this book does is really neglect showing players how to really play an Asian character. Asian culture varies quite a bit from the European culture most fantasy games are set in, and that Asian world is one of subtleties. These issues really aren't discussed much at all, and it's pretty much up to the individual DM or player to make sure that they are roleplaying it right. It's not that the author was inconsistent with Asian culture in any of the writing . . . not at all. But you won't find a section discussing the sordid intrigues of honor versus duty and what it all really means. This is one of the things that makes other games like *Sengoku* such excellent historic Asian RPGs -- they really show you how to roleplay in that Asian world. Of course, *Sengoku* is roleplaying strictly in ancient Japan, and maybe that's part of the problem -- *Oriental Adventures* is a pan-Asian setting, and perhaps the author didn't have the space to get into it. Still, it would have been nice to see even a half-dozen pages that really discussed some of the differences in playing in an ancient Asian setting as opposed to a European one.

The final forty pages or so are devoted to the world of Rokugan and give us a basic overview of that setting. It goes through the major clans, their history, and their geography, and it provides a lot of useful stuff for kick-starting such a campaign, such as adventure hooks and even prestige classes unique to each clan. The Shadowlands are also discussed, complete with their own prestige classes. If you're going to use the Rokugan setting, then this ought to be a welcome intro. If not, then this section could be a waste. Some of the prestige classes might be handy, as could a lot of the Shadowlands stuff, but much of it might not be.

Overall, the game design in this book is very strong. James Wyatt really knows the *d20* system in and out, and he demonstrates it here. The rules all seem well-balanced, and they are designed so as to be very easily accessible; most gamers should have no problem at all adapting this book to their game world any way they see fit, whether they use everything or just a thing or two. Wyatt also demonstrates a knowledge of the subject matter as well as a knowledge of the previous works he was drawing from.

Some players may gripe about the Rokugan setting, but that's the double-edged sword you play with when you use an "optional but default" setting. Some may also gripe that the fact that the book is written mostly for this setting skews the book very heavily towards Japanese culture as opposed to other Asian cultures, which are supposed to be covered here as well, and this is certainly true. The Japanese-influenced material does seem to get a lot more play, although the first edition of *Oriental Adventures* did it that way for the most part, too. On the other hand, *D&D* itself is a complete hodgepodge of historical European settings, often giving certain ones more play than others, and most gamers are perfectly content with such a mix. So in that way this book definitely delivers.

But back to the original question: did this new edition light my imagination up like the old one did? I think I'd have to say yes . . . but in a new kind of way. The game has changed a lot since those old days of *AD&D*, and this book definitely reflects that. While I'll always look at my old edition of *Oriental Adventures* fondly, this one certainly shows itself a worthy translation and addition to the growing *3E* world.

--Jon Thompson

Pyramid Review

Gladiator: Sands of Death (for d20)

Published by [Mongoose Publishing](#)

Written by Matthew Sprange, with additional text by Teresa Capsey and Ian Barstow

Illustrated by Anne Stokes, Luis Corte Real, Nathan Webb, Scott Purdy, Anthea Dilly, Judy Perrin, Danilo Moretti, and Brent Chumley

Edited by Alexander Fennell

80 page b&w softcover; \$16.95

Mongoose Publishing has put out several D20 books this year with mixed results. The Slayer's Guides and Encyclopedia Arcana books have presented interesting material, but each book has seemed a little light for the subject. *Gladiator: Sands of Death* is a more substantial treatment of an exciting topic, but it falls prey to some of the same problems.

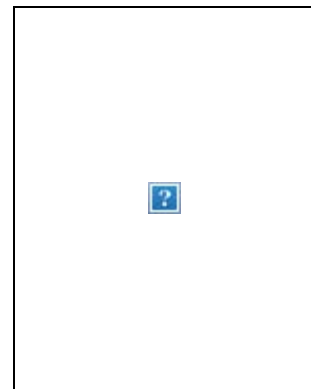
The subject is timely for a couple of reasons. Ridley Scott's movie *Gladiator* was a huge hit last year, but professional sports are in an unusual cultural position right now. Americans love their sports teams, but they're also conscious of the absurdities of big-time sports: the expensive stadiums, the athletes called who have been called heroes simply because they can hit or throw a ball. Gladiators are both glorious and scary, and *Gladiator* writer Matthew Sprange explores both aspects well.

The first third of the book explores the basics of gladiatorial combat, with an emphasis of different arenas from seedy pit fights to the grand arenas of kings. Five kinds of arenas are described in detail, with enough backstory presented that they would be easy to drop into almost any *d20* campaign. No maps are provided, however, which is disappointing.

Sprange makes good use of the many races in the *Player's Handbook*, and presents plausible attitudes towards gladiatorial combat for each race. Longer-lived races like elves and dwarves are revolted by the practice, while short-lived humans and orcs glory in it. (Of the five example arenas, four are human and one is orcish.) Sprange discusses the special strengths and weaknesses of gnomes, halfings, and monstrous humanoids like gnolls and bugbears.

Sprange also takes a sharp look at the political reasons for building gladiatorial arenas, pointing out that such arenas always cost more than they earn and that they exist mainly to pacify the population of a city. The parallels to modern sports arenas are a little disturbing.

The second section presents new classes, new feats, different types of gladiatorial matches, fame and crowd reaction rules, chariot racing rules, exotic weaponry, and a variety of dirty tricks. The new rules are functional, clearly presented, and true to the setting. More importantly, they add a certain amount of pizzazz to the standard hacking and slashing of *d20* combat. Most of the rules reward gladiators who fight with crowd-pleasing, flashy moves, and that does a lot to make a gladiator-focused game into more than an endless procession of fight scenes. It's easy to imagine running a gladiator campaign that has the epic feel of movies like *Gladiator* or *Spartacus*.



The final section of the book is a little unusual. "Sands of Death" takes a step back from the one-character-per-player style of roleplaying and casts each player as the master of a stable of gladiators. Each player competes to win the most matches, fame and gold in the arena. It's an interesting application of the *d20* rules; taking the role of stable masters makes "Sands of Death" play a lot like a strategy game, but it's still a roleplaying game at heart. Sprange even encourages players to just play the game without a victory condition, though he provides several possible victory conditions for those that want them.

Gladiator covers most of its topic well, but there is one glaring omission. There is virtually no attention given to the use of magic in gladiatorial duels. Magic-users are described as providing opening-act fireworks for the crowd or creating terrain and obstacles for arena matches. Magic-using player characters are discouraged in the rules, and there's no almost discussion of how spellcasters can fight effectively in the arena. There's also no discussion of the many ways in which gladiatorial battles could be changed by the availability of resurrection spells and other healing magic. Sprange has stuck too close to history here; the Romans may not have had mages and clerics, but virtually all *d20* groups do.

There's only so much you can fit into 80 pages, of course, and Mongoose Publishing probably had to make some hard choices about what to include and what to leave out. However, what was left out would have made the book much more useful. *Gladiator: Sands of Death* is a good short book -- but with 16 more pages it might have been a great book.

--Chris Aylott

Pyramid Review

The Forgotten Futures CD-ROM

by Marcus L. Rowland

<http://www.ffutures.demon.co.uk/>

The Age of Steam is one of the ideal settings for roleplaying games, recent enough to be familiar, remote enough to be exotic, and filled with technological wonders, real and imagined. The 19th century is currently enjoying unprecedented popularity among gamers and game publishers. *GURPS Castle Falkenstein*, an adaptation of one of the original steam age games (the other, *Space 1889*, has just been republished), *GURPS Steampunk*, and the forthcoming FUDGE-based game *Terra Incognita* from [Grey Ghost Games](#) reflect this interest, as do the horror-focused *GURPS Screampunk* and *Victorian Age: Vampire*, just announced by White Wolf. Marcus L. Rowland's *Forgotten Futures*, just released on CD-ROM after a print version and years of availability via the Web, deserves a close look from anyone who shares this enthusiasm.

As a game, *Forgotten Futures* has a fairly standard, simple design, along lines familiar from other story-focused games. Characters have three characteristics -- Body, Mind, and Soul -- which respectively govern physical tasks, intellectual tasks, and activities involving empathy, social interaction, or the art. A fairly short skills list accompanies these; skills are bought up from base values determined by one or more characteristics. It would be straightforward to convert characters to any other system with a similar division -- *Adventure!*, *Big Eyes*, *Small Mouth*, *DC Heroes*, and *In Nomine* all come to mind. Success rolls are made with 2d6; there is always a 1/36 chance of failure and nearly always a 1/36 chance of success. Rowland illustrates these rules with clear and often entertaining examples. An appendix demonstrates their flexibility, with rules for playing children or dogs(!) as characters. You won't find any brilliant novelties of game design here, but the system is flexible and free of inconvenient rules quirks, making it easy to use or adapt.

The CD-ROM includes seven supplements devoted to campaign ideas, including settings derived from fiction of the period. Most of them have a common format and there is some repetition. The one I've examined most thoroughly, *Forgotten Futures I*, based on Rudyard Kipling's classic airship utopian stories "With the Night Mail" and "As Easy as A.B.C.," is a first rate adaptation. Rowland has read the political material closely enough to grasp that Kipling's antidemocratic future is not dictatorial but (as current language calls it) libertarian. His future history does an excellent job of drawing out what Kipling's stories imply, including an ingenious discussion of reincarnation based on a single line in "With the Night Mail." And his treatment of technology, while not as elaborate as, say, *GURPS Vehicles* (some gamers will consider this a relief!), is quite adequate to creating designs for airships and represents Kipling's fictional technology accurately. A look at the other supplements shows similar attention to detail.

For the most part, this is the detail of Victorian and Edwardian fiction, more than that of actual history or actual engineering. Rowland emphasizes the way the era thought of itself, in a largely impressionistic portrait. This approach is quite different from that of *GURPS Steampunk* -- or, looked at another way, neatly complements it.

But the real treasure of this collection is none of these things. Rowland hasn't been content to base game rules and settings on the fiction of the Victorian and Edwardian eras. In this version, he takes advantage of the large capacity of CD-ROMs to include the fiction itself! If you want to read (or reread) Kipling's science fiction, or the Professor Challenger stories, or "The Angel of the Revolution," they all accompany their respective game treatments. (I'm sorry to say that the text of "The Angel of the Revolution" is rather scrambled, though that may be the fault of the original print version that was used to produce the CD-ROM; I hope it may be possible to produce a cleaned up text in some future edition.) Supplements devoted to Victorian stories of villainous plots and of the end of civilization have their own attached anthologies as well. A separate "Forgotten Futures Library" adds other fiction and nonfiction of the period, showing what the Age of Steam actually expected from its future. Much of this material is hard to find in print;

the GM who wants to base a campaign on the popular literature of the Age of Steam will find Rowland's work a major service. And Rowland's love of the milieu is evident and adds appeal to his work.

--*William H. Stoddard*

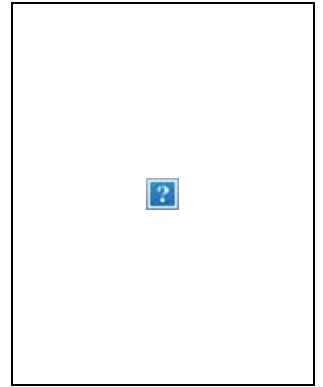
Pyramid Review

Rage Across Egypt (for Werewolf: The Apocalypse)

Published by White Wolf Game Studio

Written by Christopher Howard and Matt McFarlane

140 pages; \$17.95



At various points in my life, I pick up a book that I'll get the impression was made for me. That, somewhere in an author's office, is a photo of me. And when the author gets asked (as I assume they do), "Who, really, is this book being written for? Who's your audience?", they'll just point their index finger up at my portrait on the wall and say, "Him."

Rage across Egypt is one of those books. *Werewolf* is one of my favorite RPGs ever. As for Egypt, I'm half-Egyptian, and while it would be difficult to find a more complete assimilation, I've still got a fondness for and fascination with the land of half of my grandfathers.

So, yeah, here's a book made for me. Did it get me? Oh, yeah.

Rage Across Egypt is the *Werewolf* contribution to the *Year of the Scarab* series, which takes the World of Darkness books and visits Egypt and the lands of Southwestern Asia (previous releases in the series include *Mummy: The Resurrection*, *Vampire: The Dark Age's Veil of Night* and *Hunter's Holy War*). I've enjoyed the books in the series overall so far.

Egypt has a great role in the world of *Werewolf*; one of the 12 werewolf tribes, the Silent Striders, is originally from there. The Garou claim vampires as one of their great foes, and Egypt, with its densely packed population is a perfect habitat for bloodsuckers.

The book follows a standard format. It opens with an introductory fiction (I can take or leave most intro fiction, and this one didn't quite stir passions within me), and continues with a short "how to use this book" section. The glossary is good, although it could have used pronunciation notes since most of the words are from non-western languages.

It then launches into what is Egypt's greatest commodity: history. The timeline is interesting; it covers, in as much detail as is possible (in other words, little) the history of Egypt, starting with the pre-dynastic and coming all the way up to the present day. Sharing the history chapter is an over-arching history of the Silent Striders in Egypt.

Modern Egypt is covered in the second chapter. It's a very good examination of the country. My favorite thing about it is the very subtle, yet very obvious, declarations of what is true, and what is created. When you're writing a book that covers the real world in a roleplaying game, you must make sure that the audience can distinguish the fabrications from the reality. The reason for this is simple; if you do your job well, your readers will come away thinking they've learned something about the real world as well as the game world. Now, when writing a book about, say, Chicago, you can easily insert simple changes that are obviously such. When you're writing about a country that many of the readers will know little if anything about (such as Egypt), you have to step a little more lightly. Thankfully, the authors managed to keep the real and the false delineated quite well.

The book's description of the cities and wastes of Egypt are very well done. They pale, however, next to the Egyptian Umbra. The spirit lands of Egypt just come across wonderfully. The twelve lands of the Egyptian Umbra correspond to the 12 hours of the underworld night through which Ra rode his solar barque and also some of them correspond to standard Umbral realms. Even the map is interesting, with points of entry and exit marked out, and links to the four

mysterious towers which stand in the Umbra of Egypt.

The map of Egypt is good, but it seems incomplete. For example, some cities described in the text are missing from the map, but that's a minor quibble. The caerns of the Garou and the Black Spiral Dancers, also described in this chapter, are marked on the map. On first glance, the caerns seemed somewhat underpowered, but re-reading showed me that that wasn't the case; however, I wouldn't have minded seeing an active level 5 caern.

The characters chapter is somewhat brief. It covers all the tribes of Garou (well, all the ones in Egypt; logically, no Wendigo are to be found on the Sahara's sands). Titled "Wolves of the Desert," it gives you one stat'd out character per tribe, and a short list of what the tribe's members are up to in Egypt.

My only quibble is that there needed to be more stuff there. There are two very interesting Silent Strider Garou mentioned, but only one is covered in any detail. I would have loved to have seen more on Walks with Might, but instead we get only Buries the Dead. It would have been good to have more space dedicated to NPCs, but the book would have started to just get big.

The storytelling chapter is very well done; it covers the plots introduced in the book, and clarifies many of the things mentioned. There's info on the various Fera running around Egypt, what they're up to, and how they'll interact with the Garou.

Following that is a chapter dedicated to the enemies of the Garou. The big baddy in *Werewolf* is Pentex, and the Pentex arm most visible in Egypt is Endron Oil. There's a pipeline running parallel to the Nile that's ripe with storytelling opportunities, and Endron's other activities will make it a great antagonist for werewolf groups.

The Cat and Crocodile appendix, which covers the activities of the Bastet & Mokole, seems somewhat extraneous. They probably could have been put in the Storytelling chapter. The book concludes with an appendix on spirits & banes, which are nice and useful, although I think they could have put in a few more.

The art in the book actually caught my attention enough that I felt that I couldn't review the book without mentioning it. The Ron Spencer cover is, as always, wonderful, but I found it hard to resolve the dimensions of the picture. Is that a pit the snake men are climbing out of? The pillar in the near background, and the pyramids in the far background, while nicely drawn, seems to distract from the action happening in the foreground instead of complementing it.

Internally, the art is generally unsatisfactory. I've never been able to enjoy Leif Jones art (aside from his work in *Kindred of the East*), and this book is no exception. Alex Sheikman's art in the chapter frontispieces is also not quite what I was looking for; his pictures are not as crisp as I like them, and seem visually loose. Some of them (such as the illustrations for chapter two and three) I like more than other, but there's just something about his full page depictions of Garou and other Fera that are unsuccessful. I very much like Rebecca Guay's art, but it seems somewhat unfinished, as if they're sketches with the pencil marks still visible.

Overall, however, the book was great. I think it's likely my favorite sourcebook of the year, with it's convergence of two of my favorite things. Like many sourcebooks, I did find that there could have been more of some things; Walks With Might's crusade in Africa could have been expanded on in the book, and there can always be more spirits in there.

I also found it strange that there was nothing on the Mummies, since they're supposed to be the centerpiece of the Year of the Scarab books (or at least mentioned); there's something similar in the antagonists chapter, but I could have used more. I could have also used more info on the Sept of the Midnight Sun, since I don't own and haven't been able to find a copy of *The Sun has Set*, which contains info on it.

I don't know how useful *Rage Across Egypt* would be for someone who wanted to use it for a non-*Werewolf* game set in Egypt. It is focused on *Werewolf*, and providing a good setting for *Werewolf* is what it does.

--Justin Mohareb

Mafeking, SW1

An Adventure -- Generic In Its Presentation -- For A Steampunk World

by Dylan Craig

Overview

It is the winter of 1900. The Boer War still rages in South Africa; but in London, the war is fast becoming yesterday's news. Surely, everyone agrees, the process of rounding up the scruffy remnants of the Boer armies can't take long? The common folk are unaware that the horrors of war are about to be brought home to them in a particularly personal way by a German scientist who sympathizes with the Boer cause. This madman, armed with a devilish device which harnesses the very power of the atom, has set his sights on the Tower of London. Should he succeed in delivering his masterstroke, hundreds will perish. Will the players be able to discover his fiendish intentions and stop him in time?

Setup

Five suggested characters are supplied at the end of this adventure. These characters are introduced to the conspiracy through an investigation into the murder of a prominent businessman who, as it turns out, unwittingly supplied the mad Herr Professor Schlietz with the materials for his super-weapon. If this adventure is presented to a regular party during the course of a campaign, a similar motivation could be used; as colleagues, employees, or relatives of the dead man, they might be allowed to "accompany" the official police investigators as a special concession. Alternately, the players could be on the trail of Professor Schlietz; in this case, they may have been hired by the German or Boer governments, who are trying to avoid being held responsible for Herr Schlietz's actions. Finally, the adventure need not have the Anglo-Boer War as a backdrop; any historical conflict in which some international feeling ran against the British Empire (War of 1812, Fenian uprisings, Crimean War, etc.) could be used -- however, some amendment to the technology portrayed in this adventure will then be required.

Act One: A Murder in Earl's Court

GM Overview

During this Act, the characters are exposed to certain clues which spell out the circumstances of the murder of Aloysius Carew. The actual events which took place are as follows: Schlietz, one of his henchmen, and three hired thugs arrived at Mr. Carew's residence just over four hours ago. One of the thugs, a professional lock-picker and safecracker, opened the front door with a skeleton key. Surprising Carew in bed, they bundled him downstairs and into a waiting carriage and drove with him to his riverside warehouse, where they forced him to hand over a shipment of radioactive ore he had been commissioned to deliver but had refused to supply after discovering the political leanings of his client. Once this was in hand, they returned to Carew's house. There, after opening the office safe to remove evidence tying Schlietz to Carew, the henchman executed him with a small-caliber pistol, using a pillow to muffle the sound of the shots. Extinguishing the pilot light on the gas grate and setting a burning lantern to ignite the gas from the open tap, they then left, expecting the explosion to cover their tracks. However, once they were gone, Carew, despite his mortal wounds, regained consciousness, toppled from his chair, and was able to crawl to the tap and close it. The noise of his fall woke a neighbor who summoned the police.

The characters arrive at the Earl's Court residence of Mr. Aloysius Carew in the early hours of the morning. In the case of the pre-generated characters, they have been summoned to Scotland Yard by police messenger before being introduced to one another and dispatched to the scene of the crime. The residence itself is an elegant and well-maintained terrace house; Carew's family residence, a more opulent home, is located in Sussex, and he only used this

address during business visits to the City. Mr. Carew is a fairly well-known public figure; successful memory rolls -- or the right contacts -- will allow an investigator to recall that he is in the mining and civil engineering business, is an outspoken imperialist, and has business concerns and mining operations from Argentina to Australia.

Present at the scene are two uniformed constables guarding the door. Lights can be seen in the windows of several houses in the street; it is apparent that whatever disturbances have occurred here, they have been disruptive enough to wake the neighbors. A coroner's carriage is pulled up outside the house.

The interior of the house is as elegant and well-lit as the exterior; the ground floor holds a large study with a fireplace, a kitchen, and a small dining-room. Stairs lead up to the main and guest bedrooms, a smaller study, and a bathroom. A police sergeant is on hand to meet the characters and explain the facts of the situation as they currently stand.

The Scene of the Crime

Approximately two hours ago, a constable walking his beat nearby was approached by one of Mr. Carew's neighbors, a Mr. George Hillman, and asked to investigate a series of loud thumps originating from Mr. Carew's house, which had awoken him and his family from their sleep. Mr. Hillman's knock at the front door had gone unanswered; he was concerned that Mr. Carew might have stumbled or otherwise injured himself.

The constable, accompanied by Mr. Hillman, returned to the Carew residence. Repeated knocks gained no response, although lights could be seen burning in several rooms. Upon trying the front door, the constable found that it was unlocked; the two men proceeded inside, where they discovered Mr. Carew's body lying on the floor of his upstairs study, in a pool of blood.

During their initial attempts to resuscitate Mr. Carew, the two men moved his body onto a couch; it was at this point that they discovered the bullet wounds in his chest. The constable used the telephone to contact the nearest police office, from which further assistance was dispatched.

The scene has not been disturbed apart from the change in the body's position. Constable Harris is available to answer questions, and Mr. Hillman has indicated that he would also be pleased to do so. The characters will no doubt wish to proceed speedily to the upstairs study; however, the rest of the house holds the following features of possible interest:

The walls of the downstairs study sport a series of neatly framed letters from various important personages which hold pride of place above the large roll-top desk. Most of the letters are letters of thanks acknowledging the receipt of large financial contributions to charitable and government organizations all over the British Empire.

The flickering remains of a coal fire smolder fitfully in the grate. The fire has almost died down, and the room is growing quite cold.

The rolltop desk is bare except for a large appointment book. An examination of this book reveals that while Mr. Carew had a busy day meeting with various representatives of his British and Continental clients. He had no appointments scheduled for this evening, although he did occasionally meet with clients at unusually late hours to conclude sales or discuss business.

The remains of dinner (for one) have been tidied away and placed in the sink. According to the neighbors, Mr. Carew employed a secretary and a housekeeper, but no live-in staff. Carriages are available should the characters wish to summon either for an interview, although it has been assumed that, unless they are suspects, such a request will wait until morning.

The upstairs study, where the body was found, is a striking contrast to its downstairs equivalent. Papers, half-empty teacups, and open books and periodicals lie everywhere. The room bears the imprint of a tireless worker; indeed, a brief examination of the papers indicates that Mr. Carew kept up-to-date with every single one of his operations on practically a daily basis, and often late into the night. His body lies on a chaise-lounge across the room from the grate; a toppled chair and a pool of blood attest to his violent death.

Upon Further Investigation . . .

By examining the scene carefully, the characters can make several discoveries. However, the coordinated efforts of several investigators will most certainly be required to assimilate all the information present. Patchy or badly coordinated searches will only uncover some of these facts (GM's discretion).

- The bloodstain has a smeared quality; it appears that Mr. Carew, while he was shot near the middle of the room, managed to drag himself to the grate before expiring.
- The grate is of the gas type, but has been switched off. There are traces of a bloody handprint on the gas tap. The pilot light has also been snuffed; this would have required a separate effort, as the pilot light would remain lit even with the tap turned off.
- There is a strong smell of burnt gunpowder in this room; however, none of the neighbors reported hearing any shots fired. If the source of the smell is followed, it can be traced to a small cushion under the chaise-lounge, which bears powder burns and three bullet holes. The spacing of these holes matches the wounds on Mr. Carew's torso. It would appear, then, that the pillow was used to muffle the sound of the shots.
- Mr. Carew is wearing a dressing-gown, but a black coat and hat have been removed from his cupboard and lie on the floor near the door. His arms show cruel rope burns at the wrists; however, no rope can be found in the house. Careful examination of the sleeves of the coat will reveal some dried blood on the fur lining; whenever the burns were inflicted, it appears that Mr. Carew was wearing the coat at the time.
- The room, while sufficiently lit by an electric lamp, also has a kerosene lantern burning on top of the bookshelf closest to the door. The lantern has its flame turned up high.
- A portrait near the desk is hanging askew. Behind it is an open safe. A pair of fleece-lined leather gloves lie on the floor below the safe. Interestingly, both gloves have had the little finger cut down to a stump, and then sewed closed. Mr. Carew is not missing his little fingers; it is likely, therefore, that the gloves do not belong to him.

Any character pondering a possible link between the gloves and any known criminals with characteristically abbreviated digits may roll against an appropriate skill to see if they strike a chord; extensive knowledge of London's criminal class (gained, for instance, by being a police officer in the city for a significant period of time) should provide a significant bonus to such a roll. The obvious candidate who comes to mind is Edward "Dinky" Left, a supposedly-reformed safecracker who used to operate out of London's East End until he ran afoul of some competitors who cut his pinkies off "as a warning," two years ago. Speculation that he would return to crime has been rampant among the police community, however, and close (though discreet) tabs have been kept on his whereabouts.

Information on Dinky's whereabouts can be gained in a telephone call to Scotland Yard, but only once morning comes and an officer with personal knowledge of the case can be contacted, and a few informants can be shaken down. In the meantime, the characters have several options open to them.

- Examination of Carew's ledgers will take a full day. Of course, clerks, desk officers at Scotland Yard, and other hapless functionaries may be pressed (or hired) into service for this task; however, this will have to be conducted on the initiative of whichever character is responsible for the task, and roleplayed accordingly. Irrespective of the number of investigators, the soonest the information will be ready is in 12-16 hours. Should such an investigation be successful, the only item of interest it will turn up is that after a protracted business relationship, a certain client identified only as "HPS" was cut off last week, his or her account closed, and a shipment from one of Carew's Australian mines marked "Pallet 12," currently awaiting collection at Carew's warehouse, marked for resale. No physical address for "HPS" is given -- all their mail is marked *poste restante*. No correspondence from them can be located -- nor, in fact, can any of Carew's business letters.
- Carew's housekeeper has nothing to tell the character, but his secretary, through floods of tears, will be able to point out that all that is missing from his safe is the folder in which he kept his business correspondence and client details.
- A visit to Carew's riverside warehouse will net the characters little additional information unless they know what they are searching for. The night-watchman (whose "beat" includes several other warehouses) has gone home for the day, but the day-watchman recalls him mentioning that Mr. Carew had come by very late, in the company of two well-dressed men, and had let himself into his warehouse. The watchman had not spoken to or approached

him; as Carew's appointment-book shows, it was not unusual for him to be conducting business at odd hours. If the clerks at the warehouse are asked to conduct a stock-take, to determine if anything is missing, they will reluctantly agree; however, this will take some time due to the interruptions caused by shipments arriving and leaving during the day; the results will only be available around five or six p.m.

If such an audit is performed, the characters will learn, via the clerks, that a shipment identified only as "Pallet 12" in the records, has gone missing. A quick cross-indexing with Carew's business papers will give the characters the same information regarding the mysterious "HPS" as detailed above.

Once the options detailed above are exhausted, the characters will have little to do until their various inquiries begin to deliver results . . . probably around dinnertime. Further interviews conducted among Carew's neighbors will deliver few results, except for the testimony of a little girl who claims to have heard horses in the street outside after waking up from a dream.

The first lead to deliver useful facts, at around five p.m., will be the investigation into the current whereabouts of "Dinky" Left. According to Scotland Yard's files and the officers most closely involved with the case, Dinky's current residence is suspected to be a set of rooms above the White Hart Inn, located deep in the Limehouse slums. His only regular associate is a woman known only as "Mo," a Frenchwoman who occasionally works as a barmaid at the White Hart, although he has several friends on the wrong side of the law who might have hooked up with him since the file was last updated -- most notably, his brother, "Big George" Left, a violent criminal who has been on the run from the police for six months.

The White Hart is a well-known den of crime; the density of potentially guilty parties means that any "official" police swoop on the inn would result in something of a shambles, and most likely a few deaths. The characters' best hope, thus, is to adopt a more subtle approach. This notwithstanding, the characters may wish to cajole, order, or even bribe some police officers into accompanying them. The success of such initiatives will have to be decided based on their individual merit, but the party should not be allowed to gain the help of more than four plainclothes constables in this way.

Act Two: To Catch a Thief

The White Hart is a dilapidated two-story building a stone's throw from the High Street but an almost infinite distance from the genteel environment of Earl's Court. Feral cats pursue rats almost their size down alleyways piled high with filthy refuse; overflowing sewers, grimy street-urchins, and mean-eyed knifemen compete for ownership of the dingy pavements. It goes without saying that any "official" approach towards the White Hart will be spotted and reported almost instantly; if the characters have persisted in making such a frontal assault, they will find nothing but an empty public-house and a resentful publican on their arrival. In this case, they will never track Dinky down; Mo and he will go to ground in earnest, and leave London. In this case the characters will have to fall back on other means of discovering Professor Schlietz's deadly plan. Assuming that the characters approach more subtly, the White Hart will be its usual rowdy self, with games of mumblety-peg and cards, a chorus of drunken watermen shouting popular ditties, and the occasional fistfight at the bar -- but no Dinky. No-one, including the barman, has seen Dinky all day; he left early this morning and hasn't returned, although everyone assumes he will be in soon for his regular pint. A woman matching Mo's description is in evidence, serving from behind the bar; however, should the characters be seen asking questions about her, move towards her in a group, or start asking her about Dinky, she will slip out the service door behind the bar and make a run for it. Making discreet inquiries without arousing Mo's suspicion is tricky, but within the capabilities of a tactful investigator.

Mo is visibly nervous, should the characters simply observe her without giving their presence away; she inspects everyone entering the bar, jumps when mugs are slammed down, and always keeps one eye on the service door.

The Story of Mo

What the characters are unlikely to realize is that Mo is not keeping an eye out for the police, but rather for agents of

"the German" (Schlietz). Dinky hasn't told her much; just that a German man who he did a job for might be wanting to kill him to keep his mouth shut. He also instructed her to lie low and keep an eye out for strangers looking for him, which is precisely what she is doing.

If the characters wait until closing time, and shadow Mo on her way home, she will lead them to Stone Court Row, the grubby tenement block where Dinky is hiding with his brother.

If she is chased from the bar, or detects her pursuers, she will lead them in the opposite direction, and into an Underground station where she will attempt to lose them. If she is captured and interrogated, or persuaded that the characters are "gendarmes," and not "working for ze German," she will tell them where Dinky is hiding. In this case, she will not accompany them to Dinky's hiding place; although she pretends to be scared of Dinky, she is actually afraid because she knows Big George (whose presence she does not reveal) will blame her for leading the police to him.

Stone Court Row

Stone Court Row is in an even worse part of the slum than the White Hart; a burst storm-sewer has flooded the entire block to ankle-depth. There is a definite criminal element around the building the heroes are interested in; the twitch of a top-floor curtain and the exchange of significant glances among the ne'er-do-wells scattered around the door gives the characters the definite impression that their arrival has been anticipated. The best way to get past the "doormen" is simply to barrel on through without acknowledging their presence; any attempt at conversation will be met with obviously provocative language intended to goad the characters into a fight (however, if the party ignore the ruffians and then get into a fight with Big George, the ruffians will join in and trap the party upstairs, so some forethought must be exercised).

There is one ruffian for every combat-worthy PC or ally. These petty criminals are more than happy to tangle with the characters, relying on their relative anonymity and home turf advantage should they need to make a getaway. They would, however, rather scare the party off than face a dangerous fight, so if more than half of their number are knocked out, the rest will break and run.

The ruffians will use their bare knuckles and hobnailed boots unless the characters draw weapons; in this case, they will use knives, lead pipes, and broken bottles. They have no firearms.

The tenement itself consists of three floors, each with two rooms, a shared kitchenette, and a single bathroom, with a staircase connecting it to adjacent floors. These rooms (normally inhabited by the thugs outside, and their partners) are empty; only the top-floor rooms are currently occupied. Unbeknownst to the characters, Big George and Dinky have seen them arrive, and have hidden in a cupboard, leaving Big George's wife, Greta, to fend off the characters' inquiries. Unfortunately for the brothers, Greta's current mood leaves much to be desired, and rather than defuse the situation, she is preparing to inflame it. Unfortunately for the characters, Big George has a pistol, and is mentally steeling himself to shoot his way out of trouble should the need arise.

Greta is aggressive, insultatious, half-drunk, and half-dressed. She is completely unwilling to engage in civil discussion; polite overtures will be rudely overturned, and official demands will be treated with derision. Any attempt to search the room or interrogate her will result in a barrage of screamed insults and flung make-up bottles, closely followed by Big George's pistol-wielding exit from the closet.

Big George has assumed that the characters are police officers here to arrest him; he doesn't intend to be taken, and is perfectly capable of attempting to take Greta hostage in order to escape. Dinky, on the other hand, has assumed that the characters are agents of Professor Schlietz, here to kill him. With the characters (not to mention George, and Greta) between him and any hope of escape, he has curled up into a whimpering ball in the closet. How the situation plays out from this point is up to the characters; Greta certainly doesn't intend being taken as a hostage, and will struggle mightily, dragging George around the room, flailing her arms, and overturning furniture in a search for a weapon to break over her husband's head.

At some point, she and George will begin wrestling for the pistol, and shots will start being fired in random directions. The characters, if they are wise, will take cover; George's Webley Bulldog is more than capable of blasting huge holes in unwary bystanders.

Any attempts to tackle the Lefts must be made against both of them; this represents the difficulty of "putting down" over five hundred pounds of bellicose flesh, and will probably require the efforts of several characters. If, on the other hand, the characters can talk George down before the fracas starts, he will lower his pistol once the characters assure him that they're not here for him; if the characters are foolish enough to try and take him down at this point, he will begin shooting to kill, and will leap through one of the windows to escape once his ammunition is exhausted.

What Dinky Knows

However the characters resolve the situation with Big George and Greta, Dinky will remain in a quivering heap until the characters approach him directly, at which point he will sob, "Don't kill me -- I swear, I won't tell 'em nuffink!" If the characters explain who they are, he gasps, "Thank God! Please, you've got to help me -- or I'm a dead man!"

Dinky will go quietly should the characters wish to conduct an interview with him in more appropriate circumstances; he will even accompany them to a police station, offering to testify if he is granted immunity from prosecution. His version of events is as follows:

A week ago, he was approached by "a man" in the White Hart who asked if he was interested in a once-off job for which he'd be paid a hundred pounds. Tempted, he agreed to meet the man again, to hear more about the job; this time, the man was accompanied by an older gentleman with a pronounced German accent, who explained that the items to be stolen were "some papers" relating to some chemicals he was purchasing, and a pallet of ore from a warehouse, both of which were of no intrinsic value and would cause no great alarm if stolen.

The older man explained that it would fall to Dinky to hire two trustworthy accomplices capable of strenuous labor; he was given fifty pounds up front for this purpose, and was promised another hundred and fifty on completion of the job.

Dinky contacted Dick Worrall and John "Butcher" Black, two of his old cronies, and offered them twenty pounds each, which they accepted. The three men were told to report to an address in Mayfair at sunset on the appointed day (yesterday), which they did. They were met by the two men who had hired them, and proceeded to the Carew residence. Dinky used his lockpicking skills to open the front door, and entered the house with the men while Dick and John took the cab around the block. The three surprised Mr. Carew in bed, tied his hands, and dressed him quickly with a coat and hat from his own cupboard before meeting the cab at the front door, and heading for the warehouse, with the younger of the two men giving directions. During this journey, and when returning from the warehouse, Carew was blindfolded and gagged. All five men wore masks during the kidnapping.

Carew was taken to his warehouse, where Dinky once again gained access by picking a lock, and was forced to show the older man to a certain crate, which Dick and John loaded onto the cab. The group then returned to Carew's residence, where the older man demanded that Carew show them where he kept his letters. Carew indicated the hidden safe in the upstairs study, but refused to divulge the whereabouts of the key; Dinky, nonetheless, managed to open the safe after a protracted effort, during which he was forced to remove his gloves. The older man retrieved a folder from inside -- and that, according to Dinky, is when things went wrong.

It started when Carew, who was still tied, lunged to his feet and tried to get to the door to escape. Before anyone could stop him, the younger man grabbed a cushion, strode over to Carew and, producing a small revolver, shot him three times at pointblank range. According to Dinky, neither man so much as batted an eyelid; it was as if the murder had been planned from the start. Dinky, realizing that he had become caught up in much more than a simple robbery, began to panic; the younger man, while reloading, ordered him to collect his wits in the coach. Dinky left immediately, forgetting his gloves. The two men appeared a minute or so later, and the coach set off. Along the route, still panicked and suspecting that he and his friends might be the next to die, Dinky jumped out of the coach as it passed a side-street, and ran all the way to the White Hart.

His suspicions were borne out when, according to their families, Dick and John did not return home this morning. That was when he decided to go to ground, hoping that because the men had never met Mo, she would be safe while keeping an eye out for any unusually inquisitive strangers.

Characters observing Dinky closely during his tale can determine that he is telling the truth; he is plainly terrified, and honestly believes himself to be in mortal danger. Short of giving the investigators a description of Schlietz and Van Heerden (see below), and the address in Mayfair, he will be of little further use to the characters, and will beg to be placed in the relative safety of police custody.

It goes without saying that an immediate raid on the premises is called for; if the men really are foreigners, action must be taken before they can put any plans for flight into effect.

Act Three: Mayhem in Mayfair

124 Kingswood Avenue, Mayfair, is a large property surrounded on all sides by immaculately tended gardens, paved footpaths, and a stout wrought-iron fence. The house itself is only partially visible from the street, but appears to be a four-story brick building with a central atrium or courtyard. The other houses in the street are of similar dimensions; it is unlikely that the characters will encounter any of Herr Professor Schlietz's neighbors unless they make an active effort.

Given the possible danger which lies ahead, it is likely that the characters may wish to invest in some extra manpower or firepower; both are acceptable, within reasonable limits, although casualties will be far higher with larger storming parties, as the characters will soon find out. Any constables attached to the party will be armed with pistols only, and the use of larger weapons will be discouraged.

The first obstacle that the storming party may face is gaining entrance to the property.

Both the main and side gates are securely locked, although the padlocks may be circumvented. Climbing over the fence unassisted introduces the risk of becoming painfully acquainted with the sharp spikes which top the fence; treat this as a small knife attack. The use of a thick blanket or coat to cover these spikes will halve any damage suffered.

There is an electrical bell-switch on the main gate; however, ringing it will have no effect.

Inside 124 Kingswood

Once the party is inside, they will face another unpleasant surprise -- a recently-installed ring of booby-traps surrounding the house. Most of these traps take the form of trap-guns concealed in hedges and trees, linked up to spring-switches under loose paving stones. An electric switch in the house is the only way of disarming the network of traps, and it is impossible to avoid all of them. The network is, of course, fully armed at all times, except when the Professor and his men are active in the gardens (which is very rarely). These traps are fairly ineffective, attacking with an unmodified roll or using the worst possible attack skill rating. However, they will prove murderously effective against masses of charging policemen, simply because of the number of potential targets. In addition, once triggered, most fire until their ammunition hoppers are empty; the crucial trick to surviving the hail of bullets, therefore, is to keep moving, and get outside their fire arcs.

For every action in which the characters do anything except run at full speed towards the house, they will each be subjected to an attack by 1-2 guns. Returning fire is unlikely to have any effect, although the guns have been situated in such a way that it is not immediately apparent that they are simply traps and not an actual gunman. The fusillade of shots will continue for a minute or so. Each action that a character is returning fire or observing the scene, they stand a chance of realizing that they are facing trap-guns and not intelligent opponents.

It will only take one action's worth of concentrated sprinting and dodging to put the characters beyond the reach of the guns; however, they will be exposed during this effort, and stand the normal chance of being hit. A hit from the guns is treated as a hit from a small-gauge shotgun.

If the characters have surrounded themselves with policemen for the purposes of the raid, this scene is intended to "clear the decks" somewhat, with coppers being mown down by the dozen, characters being forced to go in under fire to rescue downed colleagues, and so forth. If the raiding party is leaner, they should have proportionally less trouble at this point.

The true purpose of the guns, of course, is to warn the occupants of the house that the raid they have been planning for has finally begun. Two of Van Heerden's associates will appear on the roof with heavy rifles, and the other three will station themselves on the landing of the central stairwell, while Professor Schlietz activates the hydrogen pumps on the device which will lift his secret weapon high into the air, from which it can be hurled like Zeus' thunderbolt -- a mini-zeppelin!

The Madman's Scheme

This sleek, miniaturized version of Count Zeppelin's invention has been purpose-built to carry the Professor's radium bomb and a light crew aloft; it will take a mere five minutes to inflate. At this point the remaining defenders will begin to fight a retreating action towards the rooftop, intending to board the mini-zeppelin and be carried safely away.

Of course, should any of the men be rendered unable to reach the ship, he will settle down and dedicate himself to buying as much time for his comrades as possible. It should be noted, though, that in the face of overwhelming odds, and especially once the zeppelin is clear, these men will surrender.

The underside of the zeppelin is armored and rubberized; ground-based attacks are unlikely to do any significant damage. A quick inspection of the zeppelin pen (the central courtyard) will reveal several wall-mounted maps and diagrams, detailing Schlietz's diabolical plan in exquisite detail; a similar tale can be wrung from any of the captured defenders. Schlietz intends to detonate some kind of heretofore unknown bomb by dropping it on the Tower of London, annihilating the Crown Jewels and striking a symbolic blow against the "tyranny" of the British Empire. However, what the Professor has not noticed or simply does not care about is that the projected blast will also engulf hundreds of homes and businesses in the area; the death toll could run into the hundreds. Time is of the essence, for even as the characters assimilate this new knowledge, the Professor's zeppelin is turning eastwards to begin its flight along the Thames towards Tower Hill.

Several courses of action suggest themselves. At the rate at which the zeppelin is moving, it could be at the Tower in under half an hour; it is unlikely that even the fastest horse or cab would be able to reach the tower in time to warn both the citizenry and the Yeomen. Calling for outside help, from the army or police, is similarly risky; the house has no telephone, and just finding the means to summon help might take fifteen minutes. However, the Professor's hasty departure has left a golden opportunity before the characters, in the shape of a canvas-covered mound in one corner of the courtyard.

The armored plates which protect the Professor's mini-zeppelin from ground fire proved too heavy for the initial design, which now lies abandoned and forgotten behind the hydrogen tanks. Great patches and jagged stitches show where the armored plates caused the zeppelin's hull to tear and buckle; all that is attached now is the light wicker frame of the gondola's inner hull. Light though this may be, it is still strong enough to carry a crew of six and mount the electric fans with which forward motion is achieved; in addition, a quick examination of the acid baths with which the hydrogen for the zeppelins is produced shows that there is more than enough hydrogen to float a second, lighter airship. The controls look fairly simple, and while it's an outside shot, this bizarre machine might be the best chance of catching up with Schlietz before he can deliver his deadly parcel.

Act Four: A Moonlit Cruise above the Thames

Like its heavier successor, the zeppelin requires a mere five minutes to reach full capacity, although this will increase to ten if fewer than six people are on hand to drag the frame into position and operate the inflation pumps. The controls are fairly basic; a lever, a compass, and a ship-style steering wheel are all that are provided. The lever controls

the speed of the twin battery-driven electric fans which propel the zeppelin, and the wheel is linked by cable to a pair of rudders which direct the blast of the propellers. Any character with an appropriate skill will have little trouble operating the zeppelin; others require successful rolls against an appropriate characteristic for each maneuver (climb, turn, descend, etc.) performed.

The Professor's zeppelin is cruising at around three hundred feet, and has a several-mile lead on the characters'; it will take 10-15 minutes of hard flying, with the fans at full speed, to close to within a few hundred yards. Unskilled pilots will have to make three successful rolls to catch up, with each attempt taking five minutes. Schlietz's zeppelin will take 40 minutes to reach its destination; should the characters fail to catch up during this time, their efforts will be in vain, and Schlietz will drop his radium bomb on the tower. The blast and fiery ring produced by the bomb will not only level the Tower, but also the surrounding buildings for several hundred yards. Schlietz's zeppelin will continue eastwards, towards the French coast where several more of his henchman are waiting to transport him to safety. Once in range, the characters will be faced with a new danger; the armored zeppelin's Maxim gun will begin to spit fire, attempting to blow them out of the sky. Most of the attacks will be directed at the hull rather than the gondola, and after a short time the zeppelin will sustain enough hits to lose altitude; if the heroes' ship takes too many hits, there is a real possibility of a midair explosion, killing all aboard. Return fire may be attempted, but without a machine gun and at such extreme range, this will be symbolic at best, serving only to draw fire towards the gondola rather than the hull.

The characters have two obvious options at this point: they could attempt to close with the armored zeppelin, hoping thereby to be able to shoot its crew or use some kind of improvised incendiary weapon on it, or attempt to ram their zeppelin into Schlietz's, and thereby either disable it or gain an opportunity to board it and fight hand-to-hand. Either alternative will require closing the gap between the zeppelins, while avoiding the machine-gun fire where possible. Luckily, lacking the armored skirt, the characters' zeppelin is much faster than their adversary's; the heroes have 40 minutes to somehow stop the Professor's zeppelin, or else the bomb will drop.

If the heroes' ship successfully rams the other zeppelin, both ships take significant damage, and also become entangled by guy-ropes and bent structural supports; attempts to board (see below) are now somewhat easier.

Attempts to attack the bomb-carrying zeppelin are difficult; although the heroes won't need to deal with its armor (since their attacks are not delivered from ground level), it will take a significant amount of damage to meaningfully affect the opposing ship. Incendiary attacks applied to a zeppelin, such as the application of bundles of burning rags soaked in kerosene, should have a better chance of causing the damage necessary to stop it.

Finally, the characters may attempt to board the armored zeppelin. Schlietz will not be available to fight off boarding characters, being fully engaged with the task of steering the zeppelin towards its target; however, Van Heerden and any of his henchmen that made it onto the zeppelin during the raid will certainly do their utmost to repel the characters, using fire axes, casting-off poles, and other improvised weapons as well as their pistols. Stats for Van Heerden and Schlietz can be found below.

Schlietz will only arm the bomb when the zeppelin is above the Tower; however, to release it, he (or Van Heerden) must operate a crank on the bomb cradle. This takes a little bit of time, and gives the characters one last chance to interrupt the drop. The bomb will explode on its own a minute after it is armed, assuming that it has not been dropped; however, at this altitude, the ground effects will be negligible. A large clockwork timer indicates the elapsed time since arming.

Conclusion

With any luck, the Herculean efforts of the heroic investigators will avert disaster, either by dropping the bomb before it is armed, gaining control of the zeppelin and steering it away from the Tower, or simply blowing it out of the sky. Whatever the case, it still requires some fancy footwork to get back onto the ground.

If the characters have access to an undamaged zeppelin, gas vent valves on the outside of the hull can be opened to decrease altitude. This requires a maneuver roll, as detailed above; a character with some applicable skill should have no problem, all others will have to succeed in an appropriate roll.

If the zeppelins are badly damaged or locked together following a ramming maneuver, both will be sinking fairly fast; characters who simply hang on and leap clear at the last moment will suffer damage from the impact as they plummet into the Thames, but have a fairly good chance of survival assuming the fall does not cause unconsciousness. A fall onto land will be less forgiving, but at least characters knocked senseless by the fall will be safe from drowning. An enterprising character may wish to salvage one of the gas cells from a damaged zeppelin and use it to float downwards; this will allow them to halve the damage of the fall.

A particularly climactic way to end this adventure would be for the heroes -- having rendered the bomb-cradle crank inoperable (by accident or design) -- to point the zeppelin out to sea, making a leap for safety (either back to their own airship or into the river) and leaving Schlietz, silhouetted by leaping flames, ranting at the top of his voice . . .

Explosion, applause, curtain.

Major NPCs

Dirk Van Heerden

Dirk Van Heerden (pronounced fun-here-din) is a Boer saboteur and secret agent, sent to Germany with a small team of men to assist and finance Herr Professor Schlietz' plan. An extremist and fanatic, he is operating without the consent or approval of the official Boer government; if caught, he will be disavowed entirely, and most likely executed as a terrorist.

Van Heerden is of average height, with pale skin and a thin back beard and mustache, and combs his hair elaborately to conceal a bald spot. He speaks English without accent, as well as German, Dutch, and Afrikaans. Dirk Van Heerden

Gear: Mauser rifle, 3-shot .44 Pocket pistol, dagger, walking stick

Professor Helgo Schlietz

Herr Professor Helgo Schlietz is one of a vocal group of Germans who sympathize with the Boer cause -- more as a result of anti-British sentiments than out of any true concern for the Boers. A peerless physicist and chemist, his work has led him to one of the most perilous discoveries science has to offer -- the power of atomic fission. Although Schlietz has mastered the technique of coaxing explosions from radioactive matter, he still lacks a coherent theory to explain the phenomenon.

Schlietz is a short, rotund man with sparse, curly, gray hair. When he speaks, he tends to use the first word that comes to mind, whether it is in English, German, Finnish, Russian, or Latin.

Gear: At Van Heerden's insistence, Schlietz carries a revolver, although he has very little idea how to use it.

Pre-generated PCs

Inspector Douglas Andrews is a fit, pleasant young man in his early thirties, who enjoys his work in law enforcement. He has close-cut red-hair, which he wears oiled and parted. Douglas is engaged, enjoys a game of tennis on the weekends, and is fascinated by the newest investigative methods - fingerprinting, psychological profiling, and forensic medicine above all. Although he has not received training in these techniques, he tries to apply the same precision and diligence to his regular investigations, and is always on top of whichever case he is assigned.

Michael Marsh is in his late thirties, and is thinking about taking early retirement and going into private practice as a consulting detective, or perhaps traveling to the colonies and working as a security chief at a factory or mine. He has had enough of the grime and crime of his inner-city beat; despite this world-weary attitude, he is still widely regarded as one of the better detectives at Scotland Yard because he is calm, methodical, and not given to spurious theorizing.

Marsh is a broad-shouldered man with receding blonde hair and a well-groomed mustache.

Sergeant Victor Willis drifted into law enforcement from being a night-watchman at a cannery, and has risen in the ranks due to his constant good humor and ability to break a large task (like a raid on a smuggling ring) up into small, easily manageable phases which even the greenest constable could manage. Well-respected and well-connected all over London, he is often assigned to priority cases like this one to handle unexpected material or logistical requirements. Victor is a large, robustly-built man in his mid-forties, and cuts a handsome figure despite being completely bald.

Captain Alexander Carew is both a soldier and a scientist; his skills in civil engineering and telegraphy have sent him to many far-flung lands to design and oversee various improvements or constructions. His excellent work has earned him high accolades; the speed with which his brothers' murder is being attended to, and his presence alongside the investigators, is a testimony to the respect and gratitude he commands in the upper echelons of government. Captain Carew is in his late twenties, handsome, and sports a blonde handlebar mustache.

Mrs. Patricia Carew has accompanied her husband on most of his overseas adventures, and thus has a spectrum of skills fairly different from most women of her age and background. She has a polite, though unflappable character; while she has operated outside normal societal conventions for most of her life, she doesn't 'rock the boat' when back in London, although she is a devout supporter of female enfranchisement and equal opportunity. Patricia is a small, tough woman in her mid-twenties, with jet-black hair which she wears in a bun.

The World Ended In 1978; We Just Haven't Noticed Yet

One of my continuous problems with most comic book superhero universes is the compression of time. In most of the established worlds (read: DC and Marvel), the entirety of their comic line continuity is compressed into a span of about ten years. The problem with this is not exactly how much happens in those ten years (which is considerable), but how much *hasn't* happened **before** those ten years.

For example, the past few years of the DC Universe have seen a plot to shatter the space/time continuum, an invasion of Martians, the sun nearly burning out, an alien invasion that engulfed the entirety of the Earth (not to mention much of the galaxy), an earthquake that practically destroyed the mammoth Gotham City, an alien attack that *did* destroy the multi-million population of Coast City, and a Joker-led jailbreak that almost dragged the world into complete anarchy. Oh, and at some point hell froze over. (Seriously.) And these are just a few of the earth-shattering events that spring to mind.

All of these dramatic stories are presumed to have happened in the past two or three years, with the "premiere" event of the modern age of heroes being the appearance of Superman between eleven and thirteen years ago.

Now, all of these plots make for rip-roaring good yarns, but it begs the question: why are so many earth-shattering events happening *now*? I mean, if *any* of these incredible events had happened 25 years ago, the planet would be doomed.

"Oh, my God! An alien invasion has come to destroy our cities, the sun, the space/time continuum, and our prisons! We have just one chance: only Bo and Luke Duke can save us! <pause> Whoops! Hell just froze over, too!"

This is also a common problem with other on-going heroic or epic stories; if the protagonists are the most important beings, and they do (or prevent) many important things, what happened before them? Is it possible for a time period to be *too* exciting? (Even Neil Gaiman's *Sandman*, one of my favorites, has this problem; the few years of "real time" its run sees the return of the King of Dreams, Death's one living day per lifetime, and the death of a major incarnation of reality . . . among other exciting events.)

(I should point out that the *Mystery Science Theater 3000* mantra of "Repeat to yourself: 'It's just a show; I should really just relax.'" also springs to mind . . . but I digress.)

Of course this time-compression problem has direct ties to roleplaying games; it's possible for *too* many exciting events to happen too quickly. If the fantasy world sees the core of magic shaken to its roots, the leaders of great nations usurped, and the destruction of all creation thwarted by brave adventurers, what happened before the heroes with **PC** stamped on their foreheads stumbled along? (*Ravenloft*, in particular, springs to mind as a setting that has had far too many earth-shattering adventures for my tastes. "By the Maker . . . reality is bending to its foundations! It must be *Thursday!*" And, really, once *In Nomine* tried to end the world in its first cycle, coming up with an encore must have been challenging.)

In my mind, there are several ways to address this conundrum.

- **There are always heroes.** Exciting things are always happening, with different groups of heroes saving the day or determining the fate of the world in each era. In the DC Universe, for example, maybe the alien invasion that happened three years before Superman was thwarted by the Doom Patrol, a small underground hero group. There are always Artifacts of Great Power threatening all of creation. There are always monumental events happening. There are always aliens, waiting for their turn to invade.

This can be unsatisfying as an explanation, simply because it can be difficult to muster up much enthusiasm for this year's earth-ending event if there have already been a jillion other earth-ending events. But it's also a good

way to sweep a cinematic problem away with a cinematic solution . . . *and* it introduces a lot of plot possibilities. ("This invasion is remarkably similar to the one from twenty years ago. We need to find the heroes who saved the world then!") *In Nomine* did a very good job with this solution (once more of its back story and history were made available, like in the Superiors books and the *Game Master's Guide*).

- **The White Event.** Named after the Marvel New Universe (a failed comic line from the 1980s) phenomenon that started all its superheroes, it posits that there *is* a specific event before which everything was normal, and after which everything was different. This is the tack taken by games like *Torg* and *Exalted*. In *Torg* it's presumed that the world was more or less normal before other realities started invading us, and *Exalted* is presumed to be relatively static for a few hundred years until the disappearance of the Empress and the return of the Solar Exalted. This can be a very logical, good explanation, but it does have its limitations. The biggest is that all unusual phenomena are almost required to spring from the White Event; if you want to propose that there are aliens waiting to attack Earth independent of the *Torg* invasion, then you may need to come up with a good explanation why they haven't been involved before now. But for a logical universe, it's difficult to top having all your unusual actions springing from the same source.
- **We live in interesting times.** There are some eras that are, simply, more exciting than others. The early years of the 1940s spring readily to mind, of course. And so does the past year.

Just one year ago I was writing my [Thanksgiving column](#) (and just about everything there I was thankful for still applies). Back then I considered that the confusion over who the heck our President was would be the extent of our excitement for the next year. I was obviously wrong. A lot has happened in the past year, and I sadly suspect the next year will also be eventful. While I doubt we'll fend off more than two alien invasions in the next 365 days or so, the amount of tragedy, drama, and heroism I've seen recently has made me realize that maybe these exciting times don't *need* any explanation. I know that I'd personally grown spoiled by a decade or more of quietude, and a part of me may have (on some level) believed this would always be so. I know now I was deeply mistaken.

The 1940s were epic, heroic, and tragic; the 1960s were tumultuous; I won't even hazard a guess as to what our current days are. Why are these eras such? Because they are. Scholars may strive for more explanation, but at its core there may not need to be any other reason. And ours is a relatively mundane world; from here it doesn't take much effort to envision a superheroic universe with millennia of peace followed by monthly alien invasions.

Regardless, we still have more to be grateful for than perhaps any time in my memory. Hopefully it won't take anything as dramatic as a Martian invasion -- or as mundane as the passage of a year -- for me to keep this in mind.

* * *

The holidays seem to have snuck up on lots of people this year. I know I've been surprised at how quickly the end of the year has approached. And John Kovalic and Ken Hite have also been snared in the holidays.

So although John is busy as ever, he has graciously provided us with some exclusive sneak-peak pages from the forthcoming *Dork Tower* #15. We hope you enjoy.

(Editor's note: We seem to be having technical difficulties with the images currently; hopefully those will be up at some point later this week.)

Ken Hite has been called by the Secret Masters to help in planning this year's Invisible Unease Parade (you probably haven't seen them marching down an empty street, and felt nervous as they passed). We're hoping he'll be back soon. In the meantime we've taken the opportunity again to publish a nice, big Steampunk adventure.

And, as ever, if you want to drop me a line, feel free to do so on the discussion boards, the [chat room](#), or by email (pyramid@sjgames.com). Please be aware that my Day Job has left me busier than ever currently for the holiday season, so if I'm a bit less available or sluggish in my replies, that's probably the reason why. We thank you for your patience.

--*Steven Marsh*

* * *

*Last week's answer: **Sherwood Forest**, from Cheapass Games.*

*(Two stars) "**Cow Tipping:** Play ON A COW ONLY, along with any Attack card except a Flamethrower. That opponent loses his next turn. Armor protects against the Attack card used, but not against being tipped."*

Dork Tower!



Dork Tower!



Dork Tower!



Variety . . . of Life

by Phil Masters

"I thought that your friends said that this caravan was going to be carrying treasure?"

"They did. They just didn't know what it would be." Malk the bandit leader scowled at his smirking sidekick. "And yes, I can see that those packs are too big and light for gold or silver. So perhaps there's gems or something hidden in the bottom. My friends aren't usually wrong; we've just got to find the stuff."

Malk scowled more as he spoke, though. Stealing the entire baggage train in the middle of the night had taken nerve and timing, and there'd been some nasty moments. His followers might react very badly if all the danger -- and the pursuers' arrows which had wounded two of the men -- had been for nothing. He hoped that his contacts hadn't lost their skill at pointing him at good loads . . .

"Here, this pack's just full of seeds!" Big Rolf, one of the men assigned to the job of searching, roared in disgust, pulled out his sword, and slashed right through the canvas wrapping that was still carried by one of the mules. The chief glanced at the man as a torrent of dark grains poured onto the ground. And then, a faint but rich scent reached his nostrils; a scent which reminded him of those boring years working as a noble's servant . . .

"No!"

Malk crossed the distance to Rolf with a single leap. The big man stared at his chief in blank confusion at the cry of frustration and rage, too startled to defend himself when Malk threw an angry punch to the jaw that dropped him on the spot. Then Malk himself dropped to his knees, scrabbling wildly as a king's ransom poured into the mud . . .

Roleplaying games are often concerned with wealth. Adventurers in medieval-style fantasy or historical games especially often spend much of their time in pursuit of cash and valuable goods, legally or otherwise. And yet, one of the most important types of treasure in history almost always goes ignored.

When medieval Europeans ventured to Byzantium, they *paid* for goods with precious metals; they wanted other commodities more. When Marco Polo traveled eastwards, gems or gold were not high on his list of direct concerns. When Francis Drake sailed around the world, attacking Spanish ships all the way, he *was* happy enough to plunder coins and plate, but he was almost as keen to bring home other loot. When the Dutch and British fought wars over colonial possessions, many of the islands in question had no geological wealth to speak of. What all these brave, desperate, ruthless ventures had in common was something more useful and much more perishable; *spices*.

It may bemuse players and GMs that their characters might be obsessed with something that the gamers themselves could buy off the shelves in any supermarket for pocket change, but in games based to any extent on history, it's a serious possibility. Furthermore, this is an interesting sort of treasure, demanding care and some skill in the handling -- a good way to confuse and amuse PCs who've become too casual about pouches of silver and gold.

The Nature and Uses of Spices

Herbs and spices are, of course, plant products used to impart flavors to food, and also for other purposes. Contrary to what some people say, they cannot disguise the taste of truly *rotten* meat -- nothing can do that, and nothing can make it safe to eat -- but they can make old, indifferently preserved foodstuffs more palatable, which can be invaluable in a land without refrigerators and with a narrow range of food sources. Furthermore, some actually aid preservation

somewhat. In addition, many have been rumored to have medicinal properties; in some cases, this is true, at least to a limited extent, while in others, the inhabitants of plague-wracked lands became desperate enough to follow up any hint of life-saving measures. A couple double as useful dyes, and some, with their strong scents, were used in funeral rites and other religious ceremonies. And, of course, they are often quintessential luxury goods, handy for those who wish to show off their wealth and taste to dinner guests.

Herb and *spice* are casual terms, not rigorously defined, but for practical purposes, "herbs" are usually leaves or green stems, while "spices" are seeds, bark, or other parts of all manner of plants. From the Medieval European point of view, the important distinction is that herbs are mostly easy enough to grow in the local climate, and hence are usually quite cheap and commonplace, whereas spices mostly come from a long way away, and can be very expensive. As most fantasy games are set in quasi-European environments, this article concerns itself with spices (although it might be amusing for a game to involve the problem of shipping loads of perishable temperate-zone herb leaves to some tropical empire).

Although most spices can be dried, and keep fairly well (preferably in sealed containers), they do demand some care. Most will be spoiled if they become damp or are otherwise maltreated, and few will last forever in any conditions. The crucial flavor elements are usually volatile oils or similar, which dry out or become stale with time. Likewise, most have to be ground or pulverized for use in or on food, but keep far better intact; hence the invention of pepper mills, pocket nutmeg-grinders, and so on.

The Spice Trade

While spices have been bought and sold widely in any civilization worthy of the name, the term "the Spice Trade" evokes one pattern of business in particular; the transportation of spices from central and southern Asia to the Middle East. Products from Tibet and China came by land along the Silk Road, while those from India and islands further south might either move over the Hindu Kush, or come by sea from ports on the west coast of India to the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea. From the southern and eastern Mediterranean coast, they were transported to Europe by middlemen who grew famously wealthy from the business. At first these were Phoenicians, then (after Alexander the Great destroyed Tyre) the trade was dominated by the city of Alexandria in Egypt. The Romans sent ships direct to India; after their Empire fell, its successors in Constantinople came to dominate the field.

When Islam appeared on the scene, it took charge of much of the spice routes, but did not markedly change the system, which was far too profitable. The Crusades served to bring a renewed taste for spices to Europe, and hence may have encouraged the Spice Trade despite temporary disruptions. The great change came when Western Europeans, tired of giving large profits to the middlemen of the eastern Mediterranean, rounded Africa and expanded into the Indian Ocean. The Portuguese, then the Dutch and British, and later the French, set to work exploring the origins of spices, and then exploiting them, often spreading spice plants to their other colonial possessions in the Old and New Worlds.

Given that everyone involved in the Spice Trade usually fully appreciated the benefits of monopoly, and fought hard to defend their own or to break other people's, it could provide a major theme for exploration or espionage plots in many periods of history. (As an example of the importance attached to control of a limited supply, note that, at times, Dutch traders would burn bales of spices on the streets of Amsterdam to keep prices up.) Finding out where a given spice comes from; negotiating with or conquering the current controlling power; defending shipments against pirates and the secret against spies; ferreting out others' secrets, and perhaps *acquiring* seeds or rootstock, and transporting them safely to somewhere else they would grow -- all would make for interesting (if often frankly amoral) adventures.

Example Spices

In worlds based on historical Earth, it's usually easiest to stick to real-world spices (although GMs are always free to bring in something imaginary, rare, and fabulously valuable, for effect). There are a wide range of spices known to cookery -- look in any good food shop or kitchen; the following are simply some interesting examples.

Pepper

Today's most familiar spice, found on restaurant tables everywhere, nonetheless has a history. (The name is used here to refer to Old World spices derived from plants of the genus *Piper*, not any of the other products sometimes called "pepper," such as capsicums.) There are several types, but "black" and "white" pepper are the most common; both are made from the dried unripe fruit of *Piper nigrum*, a climbing plant native to the forests of Malabar but now grown widely in the tropics, especially in Asia. Pepper cultivation requires the presence of trees or man-made trellises for the crop to climb; the difference between black and white pepper comes from the timing and details of the harvesting and drying process. It was known to the Greeks and Romans, as a medicine (to aid digestion, as a poison antidote and as an aphrodisiac) as well as a spice. One story says that Alaric, the king of the Goths, demanded 3,000 lbs. of pepper as part of a ransom for Rome; in Saxon times, seafarers from the east who came to London paid part of their port charges in pepper.

Dried pepper seeds are of course ground for cooking or as a condiment, and freshly-ground pepper is considered best. In large enough quantities, it actually has a cooling effect, and it is used for this in some Indian drinks; it seems to be the oldest of all spices in Indian cookery, going back to prehistory. As a widespread but still expensive spice, it became a *symbol* of wealth (as Alaric doubtless saw it), often being used to pay rents in the Middle Ages. (Ironically, today, a "peppercorn rent" is a nominal payment.) In the Age of Exploration, rival colonial powers spread pepper cultivation, eliminating local monopolies and thus bringing prices down.

Nutmeg and Mace

These two spices share an origin, both deriving from the large seeds of a tropical tree. Mace is the dried aril or "cage" which surrounds the seed, taking the form of a soft, red, woody material, while nutmeg comes from the hard kernel, grated or ground to powder. Not surprisingly, the two have similar flavors. Most chefs regard mace as superior, but nutmeg comes in greater quantities and is more easily transported and stored, so it is more often discussed. Along with its distinctive flavor, it does help preserve meat by preventing oxidation.

The nutmeg tree originates in the Moluccas (an island chain between New Guinea and Borneo), and specifically in the tiny, remote Banda Islands. It proved difficult (though not impossible) to transplant elsewhere; it likes a specific climate and volcanic soils. Nutmeg reached Europe, via a long and complicated chain of middlemen, around the 6th-9th century. When Europeans first located the islands (with some difficulty) in the 16th century, they found them hard to reach; the often suspicious locals were said to be cannibals and headhunters, the surrounding seas were full of reefs and prone to storms, and there were rumors of giant crocodiles and other monsters. Nonetheless, trading posts were eventually established.

Nutmeg is actually poisonous in very large doses (and produces a "high" in slightly smaller doses; the risk to those foolish enough to experiment is obvious). Historically, however, few people could afford to explore these qualities. Like many other spices, it gained a reputation as a medicine (and as an aphrodisiac), culminating in Tudor times with the claim that it protected against the plague. This pushed the value sky high, which in turn led to a long and brutal on-off struggle between England and Holland for access to and control of various of the Banda Islands, only ending when French and British experiments finally managed to transplant nutmeg trees elsewhere in the 18th and 19th centuries. Earlier, during one Anglo-Dutch conflict, the Dutch captured Run, the most remote of the Banda Islands, which was claimed by England, while the English captured Dutch possessions elsewhere on the globe. The eventual peace settlement kept the ensuing position; thus, in effect, the two nations traded a tiny, remote island in the East Indies for Manhattan, and New Amsterdam became New York. At the time, it seemed like a fair swap -- a measure of the value of the nutmeg trade.

Paprika

The European discovery of the New World led to the introduction of a number of new spices to Europe, not least the whole family of capsicum "peppers," which range from mild salad vegetables to scorching chilies. Of these, paprika has an especially convoluted history.

Europeans were cautious about using very hot peppers in quantity, but when they traded them on to neighboring lands, Islamic cooks took to them with more enthusiasm. From the Middle East, hot peppers spread to India and beyond, very rapidly becoming a standard ingredient in curries and the like, and also north, as the Ottoman Empire attempted to move into Europe. One type seems to have been acquired by the Bulgarians, who in turn passed it on to Hungary in the early 17th century. The Hungarians, learning where this spice came from, initially called it "Turkish pepper"; the word *paprika* ("little pepper") followed around 1775. Doubtless, selective breeding along the way produced a plant substantially different from the original form, as now grown on farms throughout Hungary.

In other words, the key ingredient of goulash, a Hungarian national dish, is a New World spice that performed a near-complete circuit of the Mediterranean before finding its current home.

Saffron

Saffron is distinctly unusual among spices. It is not a seed or bark, it has a markedly sweet quality, and it is relatively easy to grow in temperate European conditions. And yet, it is the most expensive of all spices, a fabulous symbol of luxury.

The explanation for this lies in the details. Saffron is the dried stigmas from the center of the flower of a type of crocus. Each flower produces three stigmas, which must be gathered by hand when the flower is ready -- the operation is far too delicate for mechanization, even today. As it takes 70-80,000 stigmas to produce one pound of saffron, the reason for its high price by weight (comparable to that of gold) is obvious. Then, it has to be transported and stored in small airtight containers.

Fortunately, it has an intense, honeyed scent and flavor, so even quite substantial dishes need only a few "threads." It also acts as a rich yellow dye, so that it has been used at times to color cloth, and saffron-flavored dishes (such as cakes, breads, and the savory rice-based Spanish *paella*) tend to be distinctively colorful. (However, Buddhist monks' "saffron robes" are today dyed with cheaper turmeric.) In civilizations from Rome to India, it has been used in all these ways as a sign of celebration and luxury. (It was also thought to have medicinal properties; Elizabethan books claimed that a large enough dose in sweet wine could bring back the dead. Presumably, the cost saved them from being tested too often.)

Saffron originated in or near Persia (Iran), and although the Romans brought it to Europe, its spread is largely credited to the Islamic empires, who carried it to India and Spain. The Crusaders supposedly brought it back again to mainland Europe, and one legend says that a 14th century pilgrim smuggled a crocus corm into England in a hollow staff -- the sort of thing gamers might imagine a PC managing. (However, some writers believe it was present in the south-west of the country long before that, perhaps even being brought there by the Phoenicians during the Bronze Age.) This specialist crop could be intensely valuable to a community with the right conditions to grow it, as the very name of the English town of Saffron Walden demonstrates. Wandering PCs might be startled to discover that a small field of crocuses is the secret of some village's wealth . . .

Some Other Spices

- **Cardamom** is the dried unripe fruit of a plant native to southern India and Sri Lanka, and is the third most expensive spice, behind saffron and vanilla. It has an intense scent and flavor which makes it popular in Indian sweets and Arab coffee as well as in savory dishes. Several related plants provide inferior "false cardamoms."
- **Cinnamon**, the dried bark of a tree native to Sri Lanka, may be the oldest spice to have been traded long distances and thus acquired a high price, being mentioned in Egyptian papyri and the Old Testament. Roman emperors stored it in their treasuries, and Nero burned all the cinnamon in Rome at the funeral of his wife (who he had killed in a rage). Its origins were something of a secret until the Portuguese reached the Indian Ocean; it was transplanted across the tropics in colonial times. "Chinese cinnamon" is actually cassia, a related spice obtained from a number of plants; it is generally thought inferior to true cinnamon, but the Taoists considered it to be the food of the Immortals, with great medicinal properties. (Cinnamon oil is certainly an effective bactericide.)

- **Ginger** is made from a root, eaten fresh and green in countries where it grows but better known around the world in its dried and powdered state. The plant is never found in the wild, but is thought to have originated in southeast Asia. The Romans imported it, mostly as a medicine; it has been used in Europe ever since, and is today grown in many hot countries.
- **Mustard** is quite cheap, being made from the seeds of various plants of the cabbage family which can be grown in European climates. It comes in a variety of treatments and strengths (sometimes dried and powdered then mixed with water, sometimes as a simple paste), and may have other flavors added (or be colored with turmeric), according to local taste.
- **Rhubarb** is not really a spice, but it has a similar place in history. It originated in Asia, and was long regarded purely as a medicine. Medieval Italian houses spent a great deal of money on Tibetan powdered rhubarb, brought along the silk road, to use as a purgative. Versions of the plant bred specifically for eating seem to be a post-Renaissance development.
- **Turmeric**, made from the rhizomes of an Asian plant, is effective as a yellow dye and cosmetic; it thus became a substitute for saffron, although the flavors are very different.
- Lastly, **Vanilla** is another New World product, and another sweet spice -- or rather, one usually used in sweets. (It is not sweet in itself, and some sophisticated cooks use it in savory dishes.) Despite its association with plain blandness (thanks to the ice cream industry), it is actually expensive by weight; it has a powerful flavor and scent, and hence can be used in small doses. It is made from the cured seed-pods of a Central American vine; some of these are sold intact, while others are used to make vanilla extract, in which the essential components are dissolved in a solution of water and alcohol. Vanilla was known to the Aztecs and brought to Europe by the Spanish. The first problem in cultivating it was that the wild version is pollinated only by specific species of bees and hummingbirds, but once artificial pollination was invented by an ex- slave on the island of Réunion, vanilla production spread to other regions, especially Madagascar. Victorian chemists identified and synthesized the main component in the flavor, but serious cooks still prefer the more complex, more expensive natural product.

Game Applications

The point about spices in games will usually be that they are treasure -- but difficult treasure to exploit. Although very valuable by weight (sometimes as valuable as gold), they are fairly bulky to carry in their packaging, perishable, and require some specialist knowledge to sell. Characters who become involved in the spice trade will have to understand at least a little about the details of their world's economics, and about the tastes and peculiarities of high society.

Spices may also have genuine medical uses, especially in fantasy games where historical beliefs have a little more reality. Given their rarity and the complexities of their origins and natures, they could also have magical uses. In a setting such as that of *GURPS Cabal*, some spices will have specific "aspects" and "resonances"; being valuable (and smelling nice when burned), they may also make good sacrifices for characters trying to invoke gods or spirits. Of course, making sure that one is using genuine spices of the right kind may demand specialist knowledge.

In historical games, especially those set before about 1800, spices can be as important to PC adventurers as they were to Francis Drake or Marco Polo. (By 1800, transport had become markedly better, the world was almost completely mapped in outline, and several important spice-plants had been successfully cultivated away from their place of origin. The Dutch East India Company, which had often dominated the Spice Trade, went bankrupt in 1799.) NPCs will certainly *assume* that explorers and merchants will be interested in the origins, prices, and availability of spices, whatever their actual concerns, and it is worth remembering that such information may have value in itself.

GURPS Fantasy

The world of Yrth detailed in *GURPS Fantasy* is quasi- medieval, and hence most likely attaches a lot of importance to spices. Some may be local plants, but many terrestrial crops seem to have been transported there by the Banestorm along with humans, so it's probably easiest to assume that at least some Earth spices are present, and there are doubtless analogues for others.

Those which require warm climates presumably grow best in southern areas of the continent of Ytarria and

thereabouts, and indeed, the islands of Araterre are specifically noted as the sole source of several spices. (It would be tempting to have some spice traders traveling to and from Sahud, but the northerly climate really makes that unlikely.) Araterre could produce spices of southern Asian origin, while Cardiel and Al-Haz might have at least local production of Middle Eastern spices. (How Asian spices reached Araterre, given that the Banestorm mostly carried Europeans there, is an interesting question.) Capsicums may have arrived on Bilit Island along with the New World human population, and be traded in small quantities to brave merchants who then sell to those Yrth denizens who like scorching food. (Indeed, a taste for chilies may be a mark of wealth and sophistication in some parts of Yrth.) Mustard, saffron, and the like might logically be grown almost anywhere.

On this basis, the main spice route in this setting would run north from Araterre to mainland Megalos, then northwest (by sea or along the coast road) to other lands. At Yibyorak, the traders out of Araterre would meet others who sail up from Cardiel in defiance of national enmities, and buyers who come east (around the Blackwoods) from Megalos's western marches and beyond. Yibyorak is known to be a wealthy trading duchy, and this helps explain why; the local goblin and human spice-dealers must thrive. (It's easiest to assume that goblins share human tastes in spices, or at least that they can judge what a human will find pleasant. Although it might be amusing to have a goblin merchant growing rich on dealings in something he finds disgusting. Business is business.)

SF Settings

In a space-opera setting such as that of *GURPS Traveller*, there may be countless new and ever-more-valuable spices to tempt the jaded palates of the interstellar aristocracy. Snob value will attach to those which cannot be produced cheaply, meaning plants which are incredibly fussy about sunlight, soil, and climate (at least if epicureans want them at their best). Commercial espionage may focus on identifying the secrets of some fashionable new spice. Of course, this business may shade into more dubious realms, as some spices may prove to have more or less mild mood-altering properties, or even to have radical effects on some sentient species.

Worlds such as that of *Transhuman Space* involve more sophisticated biological sciences than "classic" space opera, which might make the grocery trade less prone to local monopolies and limited production. On the other hand, some gene-modified spice plants might well be the subject of industrial espionage along with complex intellectual property disputes. A genetic engineer might produce interesting new spice flavors, although current experience suggests that genemod crops will mostly be designed for easy of growth, harvesting, and storage, at whatever cost in culinary quality. Gourmets may insist, sincerely or out of pure snobbery, that "no imitation matches the real thing," keeping the price of certified-authentic products high; some medium-sized space stations capable of supporting agriculture may find it more profitable to produce interesting flavorings than staple foodstuffs. Incidentally, the idea of tinkering with the biological function of spice plants to protect a monopoly has a long history; when the Dutch controlled all the world's sources of nutmeg, they would dip the seed-kernels in lime juice before sale, to prevent them from germinating.

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Interacting with Established Characters

by Travis Sedars

Many roleplaying games are modeled after existing fictional universes, which is usually why players enjoy them. Fans of books and movies like the idea of putting themselves in the environments of their favorite characters, from Star Wars to DC superheroes. However, many of these games encourage players to create their own characters rather than take on the roles of characters already established for the setting. This can lead to serious problems as game masters and players try to maintain order between the stars of their game and the established characters of their chosen universe. There is no singular easy answer to this complex dilemma, but there are common issues to watch for and guidelines to dealing with them.

The first problem is in striking a balance between too much and not enough involvement of established characters. If you use established heroes too much, they're going to steal the scene and overshadow your player characters. Everyone is going to take notice when Luke Skywalker or Superman steps onto the scene, and suddenly the player characters are going to look pretty insignificant. On the other hand, if there is never even any mention of the existence of established characters, players may start to forget what brought their attention to the game in the first place.

Perhaps the best solution to this is for the GM to make occasional references to known storylines and characters, while severely limiting the actual presence of these characters. Drop lines during casual conversation about how things have changed since the Death Star blew up. Maybe the guys sitting next to the characters in the bar have heard rumors about what the players' favorite heroes are up to. Describe a character that exits a room as the players are entering, giving enough detail for the players to know they just brushed up against their favorite hero, even if their characters don't realize it. Little things like this will go a long way toward maintaining the setting of the universe you want to play in, without allowing someone else's creation to steal the scene.

Another good way to bring up established characters without actually bringing them onto the scene is for the players to be called upon as stand-ins for their favorite heroes. They can suddenly get that dangerous escort mission because Skywalker and his Rogue Squadron were unavailable. Not only does this remind the players of their heroes, but it also helps them to feel like they're making a difference. Being called upon to do something that their heroes would ordinarily have been asked to do makes the players feel like big shots.

"I'm Sure You've Heard Of . . ."

On the other hand, players might actually want to rub elbows with their idols, so they might be bothered if they are not allowed to meet the occasional established character. This would be fine in most conversational settings, but it can get boring if all the characters are doing is sitting and talking; chances are, your players know more about their favorite characters than those characters know about themselves. Most often, players will want to interact with their heroes in some sort of exciting scenario. If this is the case, then exactly how to handle the situation depends on which type of game it is.

One type of game using established characters is the kind where player characters tend to be immediately statistically equal to the established characters. This means that, in most cases where an established character and a player character go up against each other, the outcome is uncertain. There are not many games like this--which is a good thing when you consider that they usually have poor rules for advancement—but they are the ones where established characters are easiest to interact with. Ideally, everyone will perform at about the same level. In these situations, there is not as much danger of the established characters making the players feel bad.

The more likely scenario is that you're playing a game where your players' characters get better over time, and the stats of established characters have been calculated based on the idea that they have been around for awhile and accumulated a great deal of experience. If this is the case, you are typically left with two types of characters: the attainable and the unattainable.

The attainable characters are those that your players' characters might one day rise to the ranks of. These guys have been figured honestly by the game's creators, and operate under the rules of the world they live in. They are not gods at everything, so they will have their weaknesses and exploitable flaws, just like any other character. Because of this, if you play the game long enough and rack up enough experience, your players' characters will grow to be on the same level as these guys.

The unattainables are, unfortunately, another matter. These guys have been doctored up so much that no player could ever hold a candle to them. It would take years of constant gaming for any player character to match these guys in even those areas that are considered their "weak points." The logic in this is clear: the creators want to uphold these characters as the best there are. The problem is equally clear: any scene containing these guys will result in the players being overshadowed and the adventure being spoiled. It is considerably more difficult to run an adventure containing these types of established characters, especially if the goal of the game is for everyone to have fun.

The way to handle each of these scenarios should be fairly clear. If you're playing a game where the player characters and the established characters are on the same footing, then bring in established characters as much as you like; most players will enjoy being equals with their favorite heroes. If you are playing a progressive game with attainable characters, then bring in the established characters when they will no longer drastically overshadow your players. If you are playing a game with unattainable characters, then you should definitely limit the amount of appearances the established characters make.

That said, there are several situations where any of these types of games will benefit from the presence of established characters. First among these is scenes where the players are in a jam and an established character can bail them out. In movies, books, and TV shows, heroes are constantly benefiting from alliances with characters they have met along the way. Heroes who are ambushed or have been captured may require someone to help them out. Likewise, characters that are stranded in remote locations without transportation can always use a lift from someone they know and recognize. No player will turn down a ride in the Millennium Falcon, and anyone would welcome the chance to fight an alien invasion alongside Batman.

However, GMs should use this tactic sparingly. Players will feel like failures or "damsels in distress" if established characters are constantly aiding them. Players want to be heroes, not sidekicks, and they certainly don't want to be just another distraction in the lives of other heroes. This is especially dangerous if you are playing a game with established characters whose stats are off the charts—even more so if they are outdoing the players at what the players are supposed to be good at.

Message From Mr. Kent -- "HELP!"

This works better with the tables turned; in rare situations, the players may have the opportunity to bail an established character out of a jam. If players don't mind being rescued by their favorite heroes, they'll love being the ones to do the rescuing. This is easiest in games where players are on the same level as the established characters, but conceivably any hero can get himself into trouble. When Han Solo is facing down an army of stormtroopers, he'll take any help he can get. Even the characters who seem most powerful have at least one exploitable weakness, so when Lex Luthor cripples Superman with his kryptonite, any player's character who happens to be on hand is suddenly going to become a powerful ally. A good rule to go by is for the players to help out established heroes at least as often as the established heroes save them.

Of course, all of this is assuming that the established characters you're dealing with are friendly and heroic in nature. Interaction is even more difficult when player characters encounter major villains. With heroic characters, the biggest danger is for the players to end up overshadowed. With villains, your players' characters risk more than just their reputations. There are two major dangers here: having the heroes kill the villains, and having the villains kill the heroes.

The death of an established villain is far more likely to occur in games where all characters are on the same footing, or in games where the players can attain the same level of skill as the villains. In games with unattainable levels of

experience, it's unlikely the heroes will ever get their hands on the villains. The consequences of the death of an established villain should be obvious: everyone knows the villain isn't supposed to die like that. If you're playing a game like Star Wars where the story has already been told, you can't let the players kill Darth Vader, because everybody knows that that's not the way things went down. If your heroes kill established villains, the whole story can be thrown off. The players may be proud of themselves for the accomplishment, but the realism will be cracked when they think of how that villain really died in the movie, or when he makes another appearance in a book or television show.

On the other hand, there is a danger that the villains could kill the players' characters. This is again more likely if the villains are made to be stronger than any player character. There is no danger in this messing up the established storyline, as the players' characters are unknown anyway, but it can be upsetting for players to battle villains they have little chance of defeating. However, if the players really did have a chance and don't feel like they were set up, it can actually be a more satisfying way to lose. If it's a villain the heroes know -- and someone who has a tough reputation -- then the players would probably prefer losing to him compared to someone the gamemaster drilled up who just happened to get lucky.

Unless the heroes are getting cocky and the GM wants to knock them down a peg or two, it's usually a good idea to avoid throwing exceptionally tough established villains at them. As with heroic established characters, villains' names might come up in dialogue, or there could be vague references to them in background. There is no good reason to do something like sending your Rebel Spec Ops team to assassinate Emperor Palpatine; they probably couldn't do it in the first place, and they can't be allowed to succeed even if they are good enough. Players can usually tell if they're being set up for a cheap fall, and they don't like it.

In games involving things like character points, game masters have an important tool to control the difficulty of interaction with established villains. If the players get in a lucky shot and have a chance at killing the villain, the game master can always spend a few character points to lessen the damage. The less expendable the villain is, the more character points he will have, which means he has less chance at an accidental death. Character points are not usually in place for established characters to make astounding feats—that's what their high stats are for. Character points are in place for established characters to stay alive and, on occasion, evade capture.

If heroes are encouraged to simply capture or defeat the established villains rather than killing them, the players can be allowed to win. Established villains who get sent to prison in books and movies can always be sent back to prison by the players without screwing up continuity. Likewise, villainous military commanders can be defeated through their soldiers' deaths rather than their own. Players feel proud when they outmaneuver characters reputed to be great strategists, and they'll enjoy handing those villains a humiliating defeat.

Established characters that are mostly supporting characters in their environments are the easiest to work with. Even in games featuring characters of unattainable skill levels, supporting characters can still be dealt with and not overshadow or become unreasonable threats to the players. Supporting characters can mostly serve the same purpose for your players that they serve in the context from which they originate. Typically, these people are friends, informants, or henchmen.

Has Anyone Seen Jimmy?

Friends of established heroes get themselves into trouble on a regular basis. In fact, many heroes' friends were created in the first place so that they could be rescued repeatedly by the heroes. Part of being a hero is rescuing people, so players typically don't mind saving someone. As long as they're rescuing someone, it might as well be someone they know. The biggest thing to watch for here is making sure the characters don't drop the ball and get the supporting characters killed. If it looks like the characters won't be able to pull off a rescue, the established heroes will have to come in to save the day. Even in that scenario the players will feel like failures, so place established friends in danger only when you're reasonably certain the players can pull off the rescue.

Informants come in a wide variety of characters, from contacts to employers; basically anyone who might point the heroes in the right direction is an informant. It's a natural step in the process of most games for heroes to have to turn

to someone for help, and it's more fun for them if the person they go to is the same person their favorite heroes turn to when they're having a tough time.

Henchmen are often the established supporting characters that players have the most fun interacting with. These guys are usually villains, but not much of a threat, so there should be less danger that they will kill the heroes—and losing to a henchman is a slap in the face to any player. The henchmen are the guys that the established heroes bully and intimidate to find out what they want to know, so players who are trying to emulate their heroes would love to have the same interaction. It's entertaining to watch the original heroes throw these guys around, and the players naturally want their turn at it. The only danger here is if a player gets carried away and throws the henchman off a bridge, which again could cause continuity problems.

Player overexcitement is one of the leading problems in interaction between player characters and established characters. Whether the players love the heroes too much, or hate the villains too much—or the other way around—even the most skilled of roleplayers can act irrationally if given the right situation. Temptations like shooting Jar Jar Binks or wanting to be the one to finally cap the Joker just lead to bad roleplaying. Gamemasters need to watch for signs of danger and strongly consider the maturity of their players before allowing them to come into contact with certain established characters.

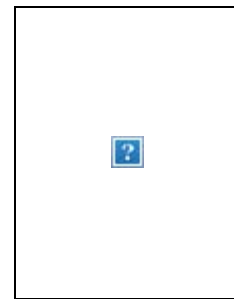
Going against all of this, some groups of players actually like to see just how much chaos and continuity problems they can create in their chosen environments. For this, parallel dimensions or mirror universes are the best way to go, if appropriate. If it's not really the established setting, but just looks a lot like it, trouble-making roleplayers can have a field day. This is a great way for players to work off some frustration. Player characters with this freedom can kill off established characters with impunity, derail popular storylines, and even end existence as they know it. Players can gain bragging rights for killing this character or that character. A dimension in which the established heroes never existed could easily free up the spotlight for the players' characters.

Of course, gamemasters and their players are free to run their adventures any way they wish, but following these guidelines can add further realism to campaigns. Players enjoy these sorts of games partially because of the established characters in them, and denying players contact with these characters can alienate them. At the same time, careless use and abuse of established characters can be detrimental to a game. Striking a balance between these elements isn't always easy, but it can be rewarding if you do it right.

Pyramid Review

En Route (for d20)

Published by [Atlas Games](#)



Written by Justin Achilli, Keith Baker, Joe Crow, Scot H. P. Drew, Matt Forbeck, Will Hindmarch, Spike Y. Jones, Michele A. Brown Nephew, Scott Reeves, John Seavey, Matt Sprengler, Eric Tam and John Tynes

Illustrated by Lee Moyer, Mike Dutton, David Interdonato, Jennifer Myer, Steven Sanders, Helena Wickberg and David White

128-page perfect bound book; \$20.95

The "side trek" scenario has been a staple fixture in issues of *Dungeon Magazine* -- and thus for the average *Dungeons & Dragons* player -- for many a long year now. Each of these short one-session adventures is intended to be run as an aside or diversion for the party as they move from one goal to the next. Atlas Games have now taken up the idea under their Penumbra imprint and published *En Route*, a collection of *d20* encounters to be run almost literally as the party are on the road.

There are a total of twenty-one encounters within *En Route*, which means you are paying a scintilla less than a dollar per encounter. The purpose of *En Route* is to use it to supplement or even replace the wandering monster table, substituting random violence with something more memorable and more challenging. As with all Penumbra releases, the production values for *En Route* are excellent, with just a pair of insignificant typographical errors. Each encounter is never less than three pages in length -- most are longer -- and each is accompanied with just the one illustrative piece of art. All of these are well done and appropriate to the encounter -- some highly so, such as Helena Wickberg's piece for "All That Glitters" and Mike Dutton's for "Dance the Night Away." The cover by Lee Moyer is definitely eye-catching in its vibrancy, but it is a pity that it does not depict the events of an encounter within the book.

[SPOILER ALERT]

En Route opens with Michele A. Brown Nephew's "All That Glitters," which as the title suggests involves illusionary gold and a woodland trickster. The first of several encounters in the book with a similar theme and creatures, it is a pity that the rather obvious title is once again misquoted. Joe Crow's "Dance the Night Away" and John Seavey's "Just a Bit of Fun" follow in both theme and creature.

Possession is the theme of "Dead Drunk" and "The Hellcow," both by Keith Baker. In the former, the spirit of a recently deceased drunk and incompetent thief possesses a character at an inn, whereas in the latter, it is a mischievous spirit that possesses first a cow and then the party's familiars and companions for yet more fun and games. Keith Baker also offers us the "Burlap Children," setting the party up against a band of young pickpockets and rogues to be; and "The Glass House," in which an inn and its patrons are suddenly (and permanently) rendered invisible. This is a good mix of encounters, offering interesting problems to be resolved and roleplayed through.

Alex Knapik's "The Draughtsman's Pen" finds the party in a piece of art with a decidedly demonic secret. In the "Heroes' Feast" Scott Reeves offers the characters the ability to gain favorable bonuses and interesting penalties in the pursuit of their current quest -- and only in the pursuit that quest. The dishes they eat at the feast are the inspiration for

both the bonuses and penalties. Food is also the cause of a strange behavior found in Justin Achilli's "Goblin Trippin'," but one which the players should be able to work out . . . even if their characters might have more difficulty.

Besides his "Just a Bit of Fun," John Seavey's other entries in the book are "The Dream-Temple of Darkest Varath," where sleeping upon the site of a razed temple opens the character's minds to temptation from a long forgotten god. Reminiscent of something more Lovecraftian, this has long-term repercussions depending upon the choices made by the players. "His Wayfarer's Rest" is more traditional -- stopping at an empty inn, the party find their hosts have a decidedly murderous bent. Likewise, "The Fox's Fraud" by Spike Y. Jones is a slight twist upon the traditional bandit ambush.

Two feuding daggers, with a shared tragic history are at the center of Will Hindmarch's "Duel." Both are interesting NPCs for the referee to control and the players may enjoy the abilities that wielding either blade may bring, but not the problems and drives. His second adventure is "The Idol," a strange and lonely religious icon abandoned aboard the ship the party is traveling on. It calls forth Jungle creatures in an effort to get itself returned home and these threaten both crew and ship.

Should the characters discover the secrets of an overnight resting place, it could undermine the conviction in their faith in Scot H. P. Drew's "Faith of Stone Apes." Religious conviction proves a hindrance to crossing a bridge in Matt Sprengler's "A River Runs Through It," when a group of zealots choose the river as a holy site. The difficulty is not eased by the interference of a pair of -- yes, you've guessed it -- invisible, whispering pixies. A river crossing is also a problem in "Toll Bridge" by Rick Neal, when a group of peaceful lizardfolk starting collecting a toll for the use of a bridge. Local villagers like the business their money brings, but the merchant caravans dislike the extra they have to pay out for transporting their goods. This offers decent opportunities for roleplaying and negotiation if the party is to bring about a peaceful resolution.

The party finds a strange prison in the ground in "Spirit Mine" by Eric Tam. Matt Forbeck's take upon the dark mysteries of the circus, "Sideshow of Doom," is a lead in for his forthcoming adventure, *Circus of Fear*, to be released from Atlas Games in 2002.

In John Tynes' "The Trembling Hill" -- the longest encounter in *En Route* and the nearest any entry gets to a dungeon, the party find the ground beneath them vibrating, the air suffused with a pale lattice and their animal companions and familiars quite disturbed. They trace this to a strange cave in the center of a hill, which is occupied by gray goblins cutting at cows, has rooms with mirrors hanging in the air and amorphous blobs that ooze out of the walls to attack the characters. To be blunt, John Tynes is adapting his predilection for UFOs et al straight to *d20* fantasy. This may not be a *Delta Green* scenario for the *d20* system, but its heritage clearly shows and this is at odds with the traditional feel of a standard *Dungeons & Dragons* game. This is even more so if the players work out what exactly it is that they are facing -- and they should. Interestingly, this could work as a Dreamlands encounter for the *d20 Call of Cthulhu* game.

[SPOILER ALERT ENDS]

Rounding the book are three intensely useful appendices. The first indexes all of the *d20* material within the book, listing by NPCs, new monsters, new locations, new magical items, new spells and new special actions. These lists enhance the long-term usefulness of *En Route* by making all of this new material quick and easy to locate.

The second appendix arranges the encounters by location: farmland or countryside, forest, jungle, swampland, travel by sea and village or city. Most of the encounters take place in farmland, countryside and forest. In the final appendix, the encounters are arranged by level, with the majority of encounters being written for mid-level characters -- fourth through to seventh levels. By using both of these appendices, a referee can quickly determine if *En Route* has an encounter suitable for both the level of his player's characters and their current or future locations.

[MORE SPOILERS]

If *En Route* has any one problem, it is this: there are too many adventures out of the twenty-one that involve Pixies or possession by spirits and the like. Three directly involve the use of Pixies in their usual mischievous mood, whilst another two contain possession in one form or another. The problem is not that these aren't well written -- they are --

but these are too many for the players to really suffer, especially if they to gain the full benefit of such encounters. Unfortunately this gaining the full benefit relies upon them remaining in good humor throughout . . .

[SPOILER ALERT ENDS]

Barring that complaint, *En Route* offers a fair range of well written short adventures, easily slotted into most games -- as Atlas Games intended. They contain a good mix of opportunities for roleplaying and action -- in addition to combat. If some are a little too obvious in either their plotting or originality, the quality of the writing offsets both detractive factors. Many also have interesting and lasting repercussions beyond the confines of the encounter itself, increasing the long-term usefulness of this book. Despite the *d20* statistics, these encounters can just as easily be adapted to other fantasy RPGs of similar nature, such Hogshead Publishing's *Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay*.

While *En Route* may initially appear to be expensive for its contents, there is not an encounter within the book that is not worth the going rate of a dollar apiece. *En Route* is good value for money and a worthy addition if not a substitute to the ubiquitous wandering monsters table.

--*Matthew Pook*

(with thanks to Roj at Wayland's Forge)

Pyramid Review

Alien Anthology (for the Star Wars RPG)

Published by [Wizards of the Coast](#)

Designed by Steve Miller and Owen K.C. Stephens

Illustrated by Ralph McQuarrie, Adi Granov, Sam Wood, John Gallagher, and Mikael Noguchi

Edited by Brian Campbell and Cory J. Heandon

128 page trade paperback

Alien Anthology at long last covers the vast scope of alien life in the Star Wars universe. Not only does it explain some concepts presented but not explained in the *Core Rules*, but it provides information on other races that allow GMs and players to greatly expand the diversity in their games.

The book has two main sections, "Creatures" and "Aliens," and for purposes of this review I'll also group some stuff under "Other Goodies."

The Creature Source Section is, in terms of just general information, a much-needed resource for the game. It finally explains the different creature classes like "Predator" and Scavenger, and provides a system for creating new creatures that work well with the rules. Sure, you could have just made up stats for whatever, but I really appreciate the clear and concise system it provides. It even goes so far as to finally explain the relationship between size and wound points, which confused me for a while when I first examined stats for really huge critters in the game.

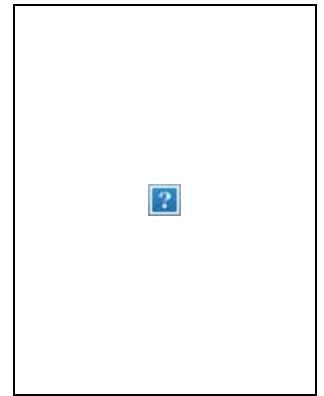
The other great addition in this section is a series of templates you can add on to existing creatures to create even more diversity. My personal favorites have to be "Highly Evolved" and "Force-Using," but all of the templates possess a lot of merit to them.

And last, but not least, they provide a lot of explanation on the use of Challenge Codes for creatures which was also desperately needed.

The Alien Source Section is probably the main reason for buying the book. Over 60 races are presented in this book, which makes a GM's life much easier, not to mention offering more choices for the starting player. The only complaint that I could offer about this section is focus on aliens as being creatures, rather than being presented as playable races. The statistics for each alien race is presented as a sample commoner from each species, rather than the modifiers and perks they list for aliens in the character creation section of the *Core Rules*. Presumably the reason is that these races may not be deemed by some to be balanced enough to be run as a player character, much like the races presented in the "Allies and Opponents" chapter in the *Star Wars Roleplaying Game*.

However, to be blunt: this doesn't help me as a GM. Yes, they provide a method of extracting information from the statistics presented, but being a lazy GM I'd rather have them present the information as clearly as possible.

As for the races they have included, I'm amazed. They cover a wide spectrum of races from the movies throughout the Expanded Universe. They not only included races that I had never noticed in the movie before, like the insectoid Vuvrian, but also races that I had thought nearly forgotten, such as Marvel Comics' Hoojibs. One drawback of this



variety is that some races just didn't make the cut. Prominent races such as the Nikto and the Weequay were not included in the book due to lack of room.

In the category of "Other Goodies," there does exist a few items in their appendix that are worthy of note. The first being specialized equipment for those who have special survival needs. Like breath masks. The other big other goody that doesn't fall into any other category are the new prestige classes. In addition to the obligatory big-game hunter and first-contact specialist, I was delighted to note the inclusion of the Gand findsman, which is the first Force-Sensitive prestige class I have seen in an official sourcebook outside of the *Dark Side Sourcebook*. And . . . well . . . all the prestige classes in that book are for Dark Side characters. While the Gand findsman has the drawback of requiring prospective candidates to be of the Gand species, it's definitely a step in the right direction.

Overall, the sourcebook is a wonderful resource, and is perhaps the only sourcebook I'd say is really necessary for the *Star Wars Roleplaying Game*. It fills in a number of gaps in the main game and makes the overall understanding of the mechanics much more clear.

--*Jeremy Jacob Zimmerman*

Dork Tower!



Dork Tower!

I am Iron Man

Combat Golems in GURPS Technomancer

by Hans-Christian Vortisch

This article examines the impact of the widespread introduction of enchanted golems into the military, as mentioned in *Technomancer*. It includes notes on the development and tactics, and describes a number of typical designs in service.

History and Development of Combat Golems

"Back in 'Nam, the old Iron Men were a bitch to use. First you had to get them to the combat zone, which was a big problem. The Huey choppers could carry only two internally and two more suspended under their bellies, while our carpets wouldn't take more than one of those things. The latest Chinooks could carry six, but there were never enough of those around. Usually, we had to use trucks, but even a deuce-and-a-half couldn't transport more than six on the road, or half that off-roads. Our tin pals would sometimes sink into the soft ground up to the ammo belts, and although they could plow on by sheer strength, it slowed 'em down real good. The GLU-1A was armed with one Pig, but we would invariably add another one for increased firepower. There ain't nothing like a squad of Iron Men in a mad minute! Two thousand four hundred rounds down range. At least they carried their own ammo."

-- SGT Carlos Meiner, 101st Spellborne Infantry Division (Air Assault) "The Screaming Eagles"

Perhaps the most obvious advantage of combat golems over human soldiers is that they do not die. At least not like humans. Clearly any nation and particularly its soldiers will appreciate if somebody else is sent into the crossfire, and if that somebody doesn't object, then all the better.

From a less humane and more economical point of view, combat golems are plain cheaper than soldiers. The latest generation of titanium golems is slightly more than \$100,000 apiece, about as much as an M113A1 armored personnel carrier. That sounds pretty expensive. However, when all costs are factored in, it becomes clear that this is in fact dead cheap: no costs for food or other upkeep for the entire service life of the unit (which can be many years), no time-consuming and very expensive training, no widow's pension and no funeral. They achieve skill levels which can be considered more than adequate for grunts, without several expensive months wasted at boot camp and for MOS training. When a metal golem ceases functioning (which takes a lot of punishing) or is deactivated, the material can be salvaged and melted down for re-use.

Golems are never exhausted or hungry, they don't require even a minute's sleep and are tougher than most armored fighting vehicles (even though they don't have as much armor or hit points), with no maintenance being required. They do not protest against being sent on suicide missions and work tirelessly to dig miles of trench systems or deploy labyrinth networks of razorwire. They can also stand guard duty indefinitely if necessary. Golems can operate under any conditions, in the arctic, in the desert, under the sea, on the moon, without requiring specialized survival equipment or even clothing.

Golems can operate most unsophisticated small arms and light support weapons, and retain very respectable close combat efficiency. The latter can't be underestimated, as targets are increasingly well protected by spells against conventional firearms. A ST 40 punch is less easily deflected. Also, their high strength makes them popular in infantry units, as they can carry more than their share in munitions, food and other necessities.

There are also numerous other fields of operations for golems in the armed forces. These include transport over difficult terrain (replacing mules in mountain units), power-loading and construction duties.

Of course, there are also drawbacks.

The Drawbacks

First, their appearance. The universal choice for combat golem enchantment has been metals of various kinds. Plastics, while almost ridiculously cheap and in possession of several desirable properties, lack the strength and durability to make them effective for issue to fighting units.

The very first combat golems in service with the U.S. military were made of simple iron, early enchantment techniques were not capable of utilizing more complex alloys. As research continued, new and better materials were employed. Almost all current designs use titanium.

The materials chosen for enchantment make them look decidedly alien, which can be a psychological problem in interaction with human soldiers. The very first prototypes looked like the stereotypical clay men (see p. TM106), while most production models have a distinct resemblance to seven-foot G.I. Joes -- blank face, perfect body. Golems can't be painted like a vehicle, as the paint chips off far too easily on the flexible surface. When the first units got to Vietnam, this was soon discovered to be a problem -- not the least because the ragtag look of the chipping paint was against regulations. Most metals are somewhat shiny, or at least they look exceedingly out of place in any natural environment. Experiments in 1970 with the spell Dye initially showed some promise, but since the effects wear off after a few days and it was discovered that the resulting monochrome golems offered little camouflage (like single-color fatigues), it soon faded from the scene. Also, the initial-issue iron golems suffered from heavy oxidation without extensive corrosion-control applications. A simple solution was soon found: Like human soldiers, golems are issued a set of heavy-duty clothing, both in camouflage and parade patterns. This makes them somewhat less susceptible to visual detection, eases interaction with humans and also offers some protection against the elements. Injection-molded plastic golems are factory-delivered in a chosen color (which makes them look like overgrown toy soldiers), but also usually wear uniforms for the same reasons.

Since most combat golems are made of solid metal, they tend to be heavy, even unloaded. All metal golems weigh at least several hundred pounds, usually accompanied by -ah- overly large boot sizes. This in turn means that golems need their own vehicles. The technomancers at TACOM were very disappointed when they realized during a rather embarrassing test of the first GLU-1A units that the M113A1 armored personnel carrier, which accommodates twelve fully loaded riflemen (under admittedly cramped circumstances), could transport a mere two GLU-1s, and that at extreme strain on the suspension. Didn't do any good to the seats, either. Weight is even more an issue in heli- and spellborne transportation.

Golems can't be repaired in the field or even at in-theater repair pools. Damaged units have to be sent back to the factory. This can be very inconvenient if you are drawing fire on the other side of the planet.

Operationally, golems are also less than perfect. They can't speak, have no initiative, and won't do anything unless told to do so by their commanding officer. The weak link is the Golem Direction Officer (GDO; soldier slang pronounces it God). The GDO is not as tough or as rugged as her charge. If she is incapacitated, so are her golems. This means that many of the advantages concerning operations in hostile environments are at least partly canceled out. Although they are tireless fighters, they are also extremely dumb and are unable to follow complex mission directives given to them in advance. The nature of warfare requires quick thinking and improvisation, something of which golems are simply not capable, despite their almost average IQ. Sometimes it is even necessary to disregard an order to achieve the mission. Therefore, golems always need somebody to coach and direct them. Being a GDO takes a lot of training and high discipline (both Tactics and specialized Leadership skills are required). The GDO always has to be very precise about her orders. Metaphors or easily misunderstood phrasing can be very dangerous. Also, GDOs have to ensure that their bonded golems don't run loose in case they get incapacitated. They are under strict orders to deactivate (destroy) them if wounded or threatened by captivity.

Combat golems come packed in factory-sealed crates and should only be opened by a certified golem direction officer. She will then "bond" the golem to her command. Theoretically, there is no limit to the number of units bonded to one person (giving the term "one-man-army" a whole new meaning), but operationally, there is a limit of how many golems can be actively directed. Depending on the tasks at hand, this can be anywhere from one to twenty. Combat units are usually small. In the U.S. Army, golem squads consist of four GLUs and two soldiers -- the GDO will

command the bonded golems to also answer to her assistant. Being a GDO is not very popular, since possibilities for promotion are few, unlike in combat units where actual troops are led. The GDO's assistant is often the more experienced soldier. In some situations a single GDO may control dozens of golems, notably in transport and logistics units. Examples of golems used in these duties include the GLU-4 Blue Man-series that function as semi-intelligent trolleys, powerloaders, etc.

Combat Golems Today

In recent years, many of the problems described (and experienced!) have been solved by the installation of small cameras and radio links into the latest variants. This allows the GDO to command her golems from the safety of a rearward deployed armored command post vehicle or a spellborne observation carpet circling above, thus "leading from the back".

Some defense analysts and many peace activists have pointed out that increased use of golems in combat leads to a lower threshold of going into action. Since far less personnel are at risk in a golem operation, military leaders might be tempted to use them much more often, and with less reservation than if human lives (of their own side) were at stake. In addition, there's the problem of rogue golems after losing contact with them, for example through jammed communication lines.

Golem rights activists, lawyers and several religious factions have started to harass the nations known to employ golems, raising questions such as: Do golems have a soul? Is destroying a golem a sin against not taking life? Does deactivation compare to abortion? Who is responsible for the actions of a golem gone berserk? Do you, when enchanting a lifeless hulk of metal, try to play God and therefore commit the greatest sin? Most of these questions have been ignored so far, but some have been answered, at least for the time being. For instance, the GDO is held responsible under International Rules of War for the actions of her bonded golems. Most large churches and religions have ruled that golems seem not to have a soul, and therefore can be treated like any other non-living object.

The Golem Squad in the 1990s

Under current U.S. Army doctrine, golem squads are attached at company level in all active combat units, typically as many as the company has platoons. Each golem squad consists of one GDO, usually a 2nd lieutenant (Rank 3), and her assistant, usually a sergeant (Rank 1), both with Leadership (Golem). Only the GDO actually bonds the golems, but she instructs them to listen to her assistant as well. Both are in charge of two combat golems each. Depending on unit set-up and the operation, the golems are usually commanded from a rearward command vehicle fitted with video displays and an array of radios and datalinks (as seen in *Aliens*).

There have also been ad hoc-formations consisting only of golems squads, for especially dangerous operations. Because of the transport problems and the relative inflexibility of the golems units, these all-golem formations (but including GDOs, of course) are usually small and used only in special combat situations.

The humans (or chimeras) in a golem squad are armed with 5.56x45mm Colt M4 assault carbines with six spare magazines and two M67 hand grenades (p. B209), wear PASGT vests and helmets (p. B211), and are in touch with each other, their golems and upper echelons via multi-way headset radios. The assistant often mounts a 40x46mmSR Colt M203A1 grenade launcher (p. HT121) under her carbine, with six or more grenades (usually a mix of HEDP and colored smoke or flares for signaling). Both also carry a 84mm Alliant M136 LAW (licensed version of the Bofors AT4, p. SO103) as a last ditch anti-golem weapon.

The golems are armed and equipped depending on the model issued (see below), but typically include heavy machine guns and automatic grenade launchers.

The whole squad is transported in the FMC M4 Loeb Golem Fighting Vehicle (GFV), which resembles an extra-wide pickup truck on tracks. Introduced in 1982, it is based on automotive components of the FMC M2 Westmoreland MIFV, using the same tracks, a 370 kW mana engine and two 7,200 kW advanced batteries. The forward cab is fully

armored (PD 4, DR 45 all around), seating the GDO, her assistant/gunner and a driver. The GFV, colloquially known as "the rabbi", is fully equipped to serve as a command center for leading the golems, with video displays, extensive secure radio equipment, datalinks, a military GPS and inertial navigation system. A small cupola on the roof of the cab mounts a 12.7x99mm Saco-Browning M2HB heavy machine gun (p. HT119) and a 40x53mmSR Saco MK19 MOD 3 automatic grenade launcher (p. HT121). The HMG has 200 rounds ready-to-use and 600 spare rounds, while the AGL has 100 rounds ready-to-use and 500 spare rounds. Three LAW rockets are also carried against enemy golems and light armored vehicles. Four GLU-3 golems find room in the open-topped cargo bed. Combat weight is 24 tons with four GLU-3s.

Airborne units employ either the Sikorsky UH-60L Blackhawk helicopter (compare p. SO82), which can carry six fully equipped GLU-3 golems and two soldiers, or the Boeing CH-47D Chinook helicopter (compare p. SO82), which can carry three fully equipped GLU-3 squads (twelve golems and six soldiers).

Typical Golems

Cadillac Golem Co.: The World's Leading Combat Golem Manufacturer

The Cadillac Golem Company (CGC) was set up in 1967 as a subsidiary of General Motors Corporation and Manadynamics. Its main enchantment line is located in El Paso, Texas. It won the U.S. Army-sponsored Iron Man-program in 1968, and has since delivered most golem units to the U.S. military. The first Golem Life Unit (GLU)-equipped infantry squads were ready for service in May 1969. Golem units trickled into Vietnam from July 1969, and were widely used by 1970.

The GLU-1-series was the first combat golem in service anywhere. It was adopted as a fire support unit, replacing human operators in heavy weapons squads. Its high strength allowed it to fire even heavy machine guns unsupported, and also allowed it to carry extensive ammunition loads.

The GLU-1-series, while employed successfully in battle, revealed several disadvantages. A major drawback in Vietnam was its source material. Only pure iron could be used, and while exceedingly resistant to small arms fire and artillery shrapnel, it was susceptible to rust and overly heavy.

Cadillac GLU-1A Iron Man, 1969

The GLU-1A was the most numerous golem in U.S. Army service during the 1970s. It has Gunner/TL7 (MG)-13 and is armed with one 7.62x51mm Saco M60A1 machine gun (aka "the Pig", p. HT119), feeding via a flexible chute from a 500-round belt contained in a can mounted in a built-in socket on the lower back of the golem. Two spare 500-round ammo cans can be attached on a rack on the back, but reduce Speed to 5. Since the GLU-1A needs only one arm to fire its gun, a popular field conversion adds a second M60A1 for the left arm. This can't be connected to the onboard ammunition, and therefore feeds from a 100-round drum container attached directly to the weapon. If both guns are fired simultaneously, -4 applies to both rolls.

ST: 30, **DX:** 12, **IQ:** 9, **HT:** 15/40

Speed: 6 (12 mph)

Armor: PD 3, DR 6

Weight: 1,500 lbs. unloaded, 1,560 lbs. with one gun and 500 rounds (Speed 6), 1,660 lbs. with two guns and 1,600 rounds (Speed 5)

Energy to activate: 800

Cost: \$42,000

Abilities: Fist-12 for 4d crushing damage. Throws grenades to 105 yards.

Weapon: Saco M60A1, 7.62x51mm -- Malf Crit, Dam 7d, SS 17, Acc 8, 1/2D 1,000, Max 4,200, Ewt 25, AWt 35, RoF 10, Shots 500, Rcl -1.

Cadillac GLU-1B Iron Man, USA, 1970

This model has Gunner/TL7 (Grenade Launcher)-13 and is armed with one or two 40x46mmSR Aerojet M174A2 automatic grenade launchers. The weapon feeds from a 12-round drum magazine loaded with M406 HE grenades. Up to eight drums can be carried in a built-in rack on its back. The M433 HEDP grenade (Dam 4d(10) plus 1d [3d], 1/2D 200) entered service in 1974. When two guns are carried and both are fired simultaneously, -4 applies to both rolls.

ST: 30, **DX:** 12, **IQ:** 9, **HT:** 15/40

Speed: 6 (12 mph)

Armor: PD 3, DR 6

Weight: 1,500 lbs. unloaded, 1,560 lbs. with one gun and 48 rounds (Speed 6), 1,640 lbs. with two guns and 120 rounds (Speed 5)

Energy to activate: 800

Cost: \$41,650

Abilities: Fist-12 for 4d crushing damage. Throws grenades to 105 yards.

Weapon: Aerojet M174A2, 40x46mmSR -- Malf Crit, Dam 1d+2 [3d], SS 17, Acc 5, Min 15, 1/2D -, Max 400, Ewt 16, AWt 10, RoF 5*, Shots 12, Rcl -1.

GLU-1D Iron Man, USA, 1970

The GLU-1D is a dedicated fire support variant. It has three arms, one to hold the weapon and two to reload it. It has Gunner/TL7 (Recoilless Rifle)-13 and is armed with a 90x414mmR Watervliet M67C recoilless rifle (see under "Carl Gustav", p. HT122). Single rounds are carried in a 10-round dispenser on its back. Issue ammunition includes the M371 HEAT and M590 Canister rounds (Dam 2d, 1/2D 100, Max 350, AWt 6.8).

ST: 30, **DX:** 12, **IQ:** 9, **HT:** 15/40

Speed: 6 (12 mph)

Armor: PD 3, DR 6

Weight: 1,500 lbs. unloaded, 1,630 lbs with one gun and 10 rounds (Speed 5)

Energy to activate: 800

Cost: \$42,400

Abilities: Fist-12 for 4d crushing damage. Throws grenades to 105 yards.

Weapon: Watervliet M67C, 90x414mmR -- Malf Crit, Dam 6dx5(10) plus 6d [4d], SS 20, Acc 10+1, Min 30, 1/2D 400, Max 2,300, Ewt 35, AWt 9.25, RoF 1/4, Shots 1, Rcl 0.

Cadillac GLU-3B Silver Man, USA, 1979

Although the GLU-1-series proved satisfactory, the Army soon issued a requirement for a new family of golems. The new generation, the GLU-3-series, entered service in 1972. It was made of titanium and dubbed Silver Man. Stronger, tougher, lighter, more reliable and nearly impervious to rust and other environmental hazards, the GLU-3 was such a success that it continues to see service to this day, spawning even more variations than the older type. Since golems have become more widespread, it became more and more important to field anti-golem weapons. This has led to heavier armaments, and most current golems carry at least a heavy machine gun with armor-piercing ammo. The GLU-3B entered service in 1979 and is armed with a 12.7x99mm Saco-Browning M212 heavy machine gun (a modified M2HB, p. HT119). 300 M8 API rounds are carried (for light encumbrance). Since 1982, M811 SPDN (Dam 13d(2)+) rounds are available, and since 1991 M903 APS (Dam 17d(2)).

ST: 40, **DX:** 12, **IQ:** 9, **HT:** 15/40

Speed: 6 (12 mph)

Armor: PD 4, DR 12

Weight: 750 lbs. unloaded, 900 lbs with one gun and 300 rounds (Speed 5)

Energy to activate: 1,200

Cost: \$107,400

Abilities: Fist-12 for 4d+1 crushing damage. Throws grenades to 140 yards.

Weapon: Saco-Browning M212, 12.7x99mm -- Malf Crit, Dam 9d(2)+, SS 20, Acc 14, 1/2D 1,500, Max 6,800, Ewt 60, AWt 90, RoF 10*, Shots 300, Rcl -1.

Cadillac GLU-3S Shield Man, USA, 1982

This is a special operations golem for use with hostage rescue units. It has Shield-13, carries two very large shields and a backpack cradle. A hostage or incapacitated person can be strapped into the cradle and carried into safety by the golem, protected by the shields and its bulk. Only a small number are in service. Some were adopted by the FBI's Hostage Rescue Team and similar units.

Cadillac GLU-3U Silver Man, USA, 1990

The GLU-3U has Gunner/TL7 (Autocannon)-13 and is armed with a 30x113mmB MDHC M298 ASP-30 autocannon. This fires M798 HEDP rounds with alloy cases from a 135-round belt at medium encumbrance. The PGU-25/B SPDN round is also available (Dam 6dx3(2)++).

ST: 40, **DX:** 12, **IQ:** 9, **HT:** 15/40

Speed: 6 (12 mph)

Armor: PD 4, DR 12

Weight: 750 lbs. unloaded, 980 lbs with one gun and 135 rounds (Speed 4)

Energy to activate: 1,200

Cost: \$109,400

Abilities: Fist-12 for 4d+1 crushing damage. Throws grenades to 140 yards.

Weapon: MDHC M298 ASP-30, 30x113mmB -- Malf Crit, Dam 6d(10) plus 1d[2d], SS 20, Acc 13, 1/2D 2,000, Max 4,400, Ewt 110, AWt 120, RoF 7*, Shots 135, Rcl -1.

Foreign Designs

DIM TA-1 Balám, Mexico, 1981

The Mexican Titanio Almado Modelo 1 is a titanium golem similar to the GLU-3B, but instead of the humanoid head, it has one modeled after a jaguar, and is often found camouflaged with that cat's distinctive fur pattern. In Mexico, it is more commonly known under its Mayan nickname Balám, meaning jaguar. It has Gunner/TL7 (Machine Gun)-13 and is armed with a 12.7x99mm DIM HK25G2 heavy machine gun licensed from H&K of Germany. 300 API rounds are carried (for light encumbrance). SPDN rounds (Dam 13d(2)+) were introduced in 1981, while APEX ammunition (Dam 13d(2) plus 1d-4 [2d]) is imported from Norway since 1988.

ST: 40, **DX:** 12, **IQ:** 9, **HT:** 15/40

Speed: 6 (12 mph)

Armor: PD 4, DR 12

Weight: 750 lbs. unloaded, 875 lbs with one gun and 300 rounds (Speed 5)

Energy to activate: 1,200

Cost: \$106,400

Abilities: Fist-12 for 4d+1 crushing damage. Throws grenades to 140 yards.

Weapon: DIM HK25G2, 12.7x99mm -- Malf Crit, Dam 9d(2)+, SS 20, Acc 14, 1/2D 1,500, Max 6,800, Ewt 35, AWt 90, RoF 8*, Shots 300, Rcl -1.

Uralvagonzavod G-82A, USSR, 1983

The standard Soviet combat golem of the 1980s and early 1990s, this effective titanium unit has been exported widely.

It is slightly smaller than contemporary Western designs, making it cheaper both in material and enchantment costs (always an issue for the mana-low Russians). It has Gunner/TL7 (Machine Gun)-13 and is armed with the powerful 14.5x114mm Izhmash ANG-14.5 heavy machine gun (fires the same round as the KPV, p. HT120) with 100 rounds. This is typically a 2:1 mix of API and SAPHE (Dam 16d(0.5) plus 1d-4[2d]). It is fired in three-round limited bursts.

ST: 35, **DX:** 12, **IQ:** 9, **HT:** 15/35

Speed: 6 (12 mph)

Armor: PD 4, DR 12

Weight: 650 lbs. unloaded, 790 lbs. with one gun and 100 rounds (Speed 5).

Energy to activate: 1,000

Cost: \$90,600

Abilities: Fist-12 for 4d crushing damage. Throws grenades to 122 yards.

Weapon: Izhmash ANG-14.5, 14.5x114mm -- Malf Crit, Dam 11d(2)+, SS 20, Acc 15, 1/2D 2,000, Max 8,900, Ewt 90, AWt 50, RoF 3**, Shots 100, Rcl -1.

* * *

Thanks to Andi Jones, Matt Jones, Kenneth Peters and Juri Ruf for comments and proof-reading.

Special thanks to David Pulver for coming up with the basic idea, and for liking what I made of it.

*For more inspiration, listen to Black Sabbath and acquire a second-hand **Jane's Infantry Weapons**.*

What Might Have Been

I'm curious to see if I'm in the minority among players when it comes to pondering what my characters *might* have done differently in a game world, if events had gone differently.

[WARNING! Boring "character story" time!]

I first noticed my tendency to do ponder woulda-coulda-shouldas when my ex-priest vampire from the *Vampire: The Dark Ages* found himself owning a sword that was possessed by a demon.

The demon, for its part, was offering keen powers in exchange for unspecified favors to be granted later.

So when our party got into some tight spots, I called on the power of the demon (despite my character being a *very* pious individual . . . in a Machiavellian kind of way). And the demon granted its powers.

(The rest of the party, also being pious, was *not* pleased by this action at all.)

Now, I kept waiting for the moment when the demon was going to call in its favors. And I kept waiting and waiting, because I had a brilliant plan for how I was going to deal with this conundrum.

Unfortunately, the GM resolved the situation by having outside forces remove the cursed sword from my possession before the demon could call in its boons. As a result, I never got to use my scheme, namely:

I was going to say, "No."

When the demon showed up asking for its boon, I was going to say, "No thanks. Whatever you want me to do, I'm not going to do it. I understand I'll probably have some punishment now; I may even be damned to hell. That's fine. But you should consider that, through me, you've used your powers to serve the Greater Good . . . which should be interesting to explain to your infernal masters. And also consider this: In the future, you should get the favor first, *then* give the power. Or at least get it in writing. You just made a bad deal."

Now, as a player I completely understood that the odds of this scheme actually working were almost nil. But my *character* thought the plan was foolproof. And, in a lot of ways, I wish I could have had the opportunity to play through that scene, if only to see *how* it wouldn't have worked.

[END boring character story. Resume nigh-incoherent rambling.]

In hindsight, I know now what my mistake was: I didn't tell the GM about this possible scene. At the time I was keeping it a secret so that I could surprise him (I personally believe a player should always have a few tricks up his sleeve). But if I had told him about this possibility, it may well have sparked his imagination and given him an interesting resolution to a plot thread he may have felt painted into a corner by, not knowing how to resolve it without outside intervention.

But anyway, ever since then I've found myself pondering other possible resolutions to situations that have arisen in our gaming sessions. Some of these have been incorporated into future encounters (since, let's be honest, there tends to be a fair of repetition among situations heroes face). And some have been relegated to . . . well, column anecdote fodder.

There are a few uses for thinking about what might have been (or what might yet still be). First off, as I mentioned above, by sharing the possibilities with the GM you can possibly influence the campaign into a storyline you might have fun playing. Even if those events *can't* happen anymore, they might still be useful in roleplaying with [alternate timelines or universes](#).

Also, sharing how you would like a situation to have ended can give your GM (and the other players, if you tell them) some insight as to what style of game you'd like to play in. For example, the armchair psychologist might posit (more

or less correctly) that I like "intellectual" conclusions, where the enemy can sometimes be out-witted, out-planned, or otherwise double-crossed. And, indeed, once our GM knew what I had in mind, there were other opportunities in the future for my character to do just that.

Finally, many people I know take the notion of what might have been one step further, writing entire "fictional" stories (fictional in quotes because, y'know, they're all fictional stories) based on their characters and the campaign world, either as what might have been or as a solo extension of a beloved game series. This can be especially nice if a campaign ended without a definite "conclusion," or if you plan to write best-selling novels in the future based on your campaign's exploits. (Get your other players to sign releases . . . or at least make sure they're not working on their *own* books.)

But as for me, one of my favorite roleplaying moments never happened.

* * *

Ken Hite is taking another week off, as his top-secret projects continue to keep him busy. Hopefully he'll be back next week with something special, just for us . . .

--*Steven Marsh*

* * *

*Last week's answer: **Battle Cattle Card Game***

(three stars) "In 3724, Second Republic scientists discovered jump coordinates for a new planet. Once opened, explorers were puzzled to find a system almost identical to Earth. It had a robust yellow sun, nine planets, an asteroid belt, and the rotation and orbit of its third planet were identical to Earth."

The Warsaw Ghetto

by Gene Seabolt

(Editor's note: This piece will be appearing in the upcoming [GURPS Dark Places](#) book of horror locales, and is a perfect fit for our World War II theme issue. We hope you enjoy this sneak peak.)

Man has confined most of his darkest imaginings to the pages of fiction. Beginning in the late 1930s, one of the most horrific of these fantasies took shape in pages of a different sort -- the meticulously kept records of the Nazi regime.

Within those countless lists of names and plans of action, the Holocaust began. Transformed from psychotic thought to incomprehensible deed, it would claim millions of mostly Jewish lives, stripping them of everything save despair.

In the midst of this epic suffering, one place stood out, a place where a thin thread of hope refused to succumb to Hitler's genocidal dream. This magnificent defiance would, for most, serve only to prolong their misery. Ultimately, this may have been the darkest place of a dark war, a place where hope failed all but a handful of the valiant souls brave enough to hold onto it. This was the Warsaw ghetto.

Brutal Onset

The Germans began World War II by invading Poland on Sept. 1, 1939. They quickly swept through the country, encountering their first real resistance at the capital, Warsaw.

During the fighting, barricades and tunnels sprang up around the city. Food immediately became scarce. The intense German bombing shattered many buildings and claimed many residents' lives; one might not recognize a street walked through in the morning when passing back through in the afternoon. The bombs carried beneath a Stuka's wings do 6d x 110 explosive damage -- the single bomb from beneath its fuselage does 6d x 1,000! For the injured, medical attention proved very difficult to find. When found, conditions might not have been sanitary enough for more than rudimentary care (simply First-Aid in **GURPS** terms).

Warsaw fell on Sept. 24. The 360,000 Jews who made up some 30% of its population suffered even more anxiety than most Poles, for most of their leadership had fled on Sept. 7, and the Nazis held an unconcealed hatred for their race.

The early persecution from Germans and some native Poles took the form of random beatings, picking Jews off the street for work details, and pulling the occasional family from its home. By November, the Nazis were seizing any remotely liquid assets in excess of 2,000 zloty (roughly a months' pre-war wages), expelling Jews from "key" industries, and limiting them to earning 500 zloty a month. On Nov. 12, the SS ordered all Jews over 12 years old to wear the Star of David. By this time, 53 Jews had been killed in a single reprisal for the beating of a Polish policeman.

The Germans introduced rationing into the already grim food situation. Jews whose appearance did not immediately mark them as such could sneak into the villages, trading for foodstuffs (potatoes, eggs, cheese, and sausage) and selling them in Warsaw. With skill (Area Knowledge and Streetwise, primarily) and luck, the smuggler could make a tidy profit. If caught, the Germans would beat him and confiscate the goods.

The Nazis ratcheted up their efforts by establishing the ghetto in September 1940. Jews living outside the area -- and most of them did -- had to scramble to find rooms. Including refugees from the immediate locale, the SS herded about 445,000 Jews into the ghetto, a roughly 3.5-square-mile neighborhood that made up 2.4% of Warsaw and normally housed only about one-third that number.

At first, getting out without proper authorization wasn't too hard (perhaps a Fast-Talk roll at -2) and getting back in

even easier (Fast-Talk at +2). The guards didn't search those leaving, but almost always inspected those returning. Sometimes, they would only take any contraband. Usually, they beat the failed smuggler, as well.

The Wall

On Nov. 15, 1940, security tightened. The Nazis ringed the ghetto with a 10-foot wall. Cut off from the rest of Warsaw, the Jews risked being shot on sight if they left.

By this time, starvation was beginning to take its toll, with the average ghetto resident receiving only about one meal a day in his rations. The desperate rummaged through garbage cans. Typhus and other diseases spread through the ghetto. Corpses littered the streets until eventually carted off.

Those living in the ghetto had to either risk their lives smuggling food or know that they would dwindle away. Heating and medical supplies also reached critical shortages. (Use the starvation and disease rules from *GURPS Basic* or *Compendium II*, with the rules for surviving cold conditions as the severe winter of 1940-'41 advances.) With the rising of the wall, smuggling usually took the form of tossing what valuables a family retained to Polish black-market dealers, who tossed back food . . . if honest. Sometimes, German submachine-gun fire interrupted the transaction. Starvation and privation take time, but slowly deaths mounted, reaching hundreds per day. Between January 1941 and May 1942, some 61,000 Jews had died of starvation or related disease.

On to the Camps

Despite its speedy work, death was moving too slowly in the ghetto to satisfy the SS. The Nazis having formally adopted the Final Solution on Jan. 20, 1942, five months later Reichsführer Heinrich Himmler ordered the Warsaw Jews "resettled" to Treblinka and other extermination camps.

The SS ordered the Judenrat (the Jewish council and police that they appointed to administer the ghetto) to deliver 6,000 people per day for deportation, a decision-making process that must have been anguishing. Once one's name went on this list, it became next to impossible to escape the fastidious Germans. But it could be done -- from behind false walls, in attics, even within furniture. Some Jews escaped the ghetto to the countryside, where villagers concealed them. A high Survival (Woodlands) skill could make this journey much easier.

Most preferred the German promise of a "work camp" to living as a refugee under the most severe conditions. (In fact, remaining in very confined quarters for months on end can be nearly as unhealthy as starvation. The GM may need to invent HT rolls and their impact for those practicing torturous concealment techniques.) In two months, more than 310,000 Jews had gone to the alleged work camps -- and on to the gas chambers -- leaving but 60,000 in the ghetto by the end of September. These lived in a ghost town, with whole streets abandoned and ransacked.

Many of the remaining Jews held no illusions about what awaited them. Some chose to fight. They organized a partisan group, called the Jewish Fighting Organization, or ZOB by its Polish initials. ZOB boasted 22 cells, most consisting of some 20-30 men and women. Most were young, 18-21, with no money for weapons nor experience in using them.

The Uprisings

In January 1943, Himmler ordered that the SS remove the remaining Warsaw Jews by Feb. 15.

Those ZOB fighters who had obtained arms from Polish sympathizers resisted. Some holed up in attics with an iron bar, waiting for a helmeted head to appear. Those lucky few with pistols killed a few Germans, whose arms then went to a few more ZOB members, who then killed a few more Germans. In the end, 20

Life in ZOB

Members of ZOB cell generally lived a communal existence, eating, sleeping, and fighting together.

Their most important activities included keeping a constant watch

Germans died with 50 wounded. This surprising resistance, combined with yet another intense winter and a shortage of railroad rolling stock, caused the SS to miss Himmler's deadline.

The ZOB fighters increased their efforts. A daring sundown jail break gave them the credibility to influence ghetto politics, and desperate criminal practices (see sidebar, p. 00) gave them funds to arm themselves. They prepared bunkers and tunnels and tactics.

The Final Assault

During Passover in April 1943, Himmler sent the SS in to clear out the ghetto. By then, the Germans had isolated the central ghetto, an area of some 1,000 by 300 yards. At 4 a.m. on April 19, more than 2,000 Waffen SS under SS General Jürgen Stroop marched in supported by tanks, artillery, and motorcycle troops.

The ZOB cells fought back, exploding their pre-set demolition charges, throwing grenades and Molotov cocktails, then switching firing positions as quickly as they had opened fire. The Germans abandoned their marching order, turning to flamethrowers and the urban-combat tactics they had learned in Stalingrad and elsewhere.

ZOB positions -- and more importantly, communication between ZOB cells -- began to break down. The remaining fighters scouted furiously for new fighting positions as their "lines" broke. The German flamethrowers had started an inferno. Whole buildings slid down around the Jewish partisans as they scrambled about the smoke and flames of the ghetto. Those caught in the burning buildings jumped from upper stories, then dragged their broken bodies toward the shelter of those structures still standing. Some returned to the flames rather than face capture.

In the rubble-filled streets, one ZOB fighter encountered a living infant in the arms of its dead mother. Sections of the ghetto wall had collapsed, but Nazi troops waited in ambush on the other side of most of these alluring escape routes.

After nearly two weeks of fighting, the Germans pulled back to bombard the ghetto. Most of the ZOB fighters remained alive, and looked for ways to escape the carnage to fight again. The first attempts to enlist outside help got the emissaries killed. Finally, a tunnel that passed underneath the ghetto wall proved safe. Out in the "Aryan" city, the ZOB scouts enlisted aid, even from the Shmaltsovniks, a blackmail-group that normally extorted Jews, and took a tidy fee for their services here even though they believed they were helping to rescue non-Jews caught in the killing.

The essential question remained how to get the fighters out of the ghetto where the contracted trucks and aid awaited them. The ZOB scouts settled upon using the sewers, but this was no simple trick. The Germans would toss grenades and spray automatic fire into the manholes when they heard footsteps. The main passages -- about 6' high -- usually had a strong flow of excrement. Worse, the small side passages often required crawling on one's belly in sewage. Even these dedicated partisans at times had to be threatened at gunpoint to advance; the GM would be justified in requiring Will rolls to take part in this stench-filled, dangerous journey.

Several ZOB fighters escaped the ghetto in this way, but many were not so fortunate. Nearly 100 fighters were huddling in the bunker Mila 18 when the Germans discovered it and poured poison gas down its ventilation slits. The

for German soldiers, and practicing their still-minimal combat skills. They placed emphasis on Fast-Draw techniques and accurate fire, given their constant need to conceal their arms and shortage of ammunition. Of course, they couldn't actually fire their weapons during target practice, so ZOB PCs should be inventive as to how they're going to actually improve their skill without actually using it!

The ZOB cells were also factions, in that they represented the wide variety of political leanings and religious practices in the Jewish community of the period. Skill in Politics, Savior-Faire, and Religion could play a large role in maintaining cooperation between various ZOB cells -- and given their meager resources, only the fullest cooperation often could mean the difference between living another day or death.

Beyond the Germans and their own internal frictions, the ZOB fighters had to keep a wary eye on the remainder of the Jewish populace. Some were out-and-out collaborators. Even among non-collaborators, some Jews, including the Judenrat, felt the need to resist the ZOB fighters. In turn, the ever-poor ZOB members often preyed upon rich Jews still hoarding wealth to fund their weapons purchases. If reason didn't work, threats and even kidnapping were used.

survivors killed themselves or died in a hopeless effort to burst free.

In the Ashes

The ghetto fell on May 16, 1943. Stroop reported that, "The former Jewish quarter of Warsaw is no longer in existence." Some 300 Germans had died in the fighting -- but perhaps as many as 20,000 Jews remained living in secrecy in Warsaw.

ZOB switched its efforts to rescuing and supporting its fellow Jews. Working completely from underground, with assistance only from other Polish underground movements, they preserved the lives of some 3,000 Jews. With the Polish uprising of August 1944, ZOB once again entered the fighting -- and once again found itself on the losing end. The Nazis bathed the Polish resistance in blood, even as they retreated before the Soviet advance.

Less than a year later, Hitler had died by his own hand and the Third Reich had shared the ghetto's fate. Even then, persecution of Jews did not cease in Poland -- a 1946 pogrom in Kielce cost 42 lives.

Many would not escape the horror until they set foot on the soil of Palestine.

The Gold Circle of Valor, and the Sacrificial Pistol

by Alice Turow

War has a tendency to give rise to objects that are immediately familiar yet somehow alien. We all know what medals are, but to see one nestled in a grandfather's cardboard box can still give us a breathless pause . . . especially if he never mentioned it before. We likewise know what firearms are, yet many of us have never even held a pistol, let alone fired one, or used it to take a life.

Here, then, are two wartime items with mysterious effects. The reasoning behind them is not explained; blame the occult, superscience, or the workings of "top men." Although designed with World War II in mind, these two objects can easily be transplanted to many eras with almost no effort; there have always been medals of honor, and the Sacrificial Pistol could just as easily be the Sacrificial Sword or the Sacrificial Phaser.

The Gold Circle of Valor

"There are deeds that a conscionable country cannot ask of its citizens, yet that must be done. There are prices too great to be paid, yet too dire to not. There are sacrifices made that keep a man from sleeping at night, so that all men may slumber in peace.

"Through your actions, Sergeant Jessen, three dozen men have lived. You have sacrificed for your nation, beyond the realm that any merciful power could ask. For that, you have our gratitude. We can grant you peace in the only way possible, yet at the cost of another sacrifice. Do you accept the Gold Circle?"

The Gold Circle of Valor (also known among some -- derisively -- as the Gold Hecatomb) is a medal offered to those who have given some great sacrifice for the country. It is itself a simple gold ring, approximately 1-1/2" inches in diameter and 1/8" inch thick at the edges, attached to a simple ribbon with a pin.

The effect of the Gold Circle, however, belies its simple appearance. For, when willingly accepted and worn once, it will "absorb" the memory for which the medal was given. The medal need only be worn once to absorb the memory; it may be worn again in the future without further effect. The medal only works if the recipient makes a conscious -- and usually verbal -- decision to accept its effects. The memory absorbed can be several seconds or years long; there seems to be no upper or lower limits to what it can absorb. Lost memories are not replaced with anything; there are simply holes in the person's recollections. Given enough time, it is entirely possible to forget those memories even existed. After all, specifically remembering that we've forgotten something is a rare thing . . .

The Gold Circle was created (and is almost exclusively used) to give heroes a normal life after a painful but heroic deed or sacrifice. One man accepted the Gold Circle after he and his friend -- both intelligence officers -- were surrounded by Japanese soldiers. The soldier was aware his friend knew sensitive information regarding fleet movements in the Pacific, and knew they would probably be able to extract it out of him. To keep that from happening, he shot his friend, and then turned the gun to end his own life; he was captured before he could pull the trigger, and was eventually rescued (though not before many days of brutal -- and fruitless -- interrogation). Another saboteur accepted the Gold Circle after he poisoned a village's water supply, crippling Nazi efforts there but also no doubt dooming many civilians to a painful death. And one young woman took the Gold Circle after almost a year of gathering intelligence among enemy officers through any means necessary, no matter how disgusting or demeaning.

How the Gold Circle of Valor is used in a campaign depends on how much is known about it. If the general populace knows what it is and what it does, then the Gold Circle becomes a symbol of bittersweet sacrifice; yes, the wearer is a hero, but he's probably done something or seen something horrific enough that he needs the medal. This may actually give the recipient little comfort; all he can be confident of is that, at some point, the memories were painful enough to

accept having them removed.

If, on the other hand, the true nature of the Gold Circle is known only to those who give and receive it, then it merely becomes another icon of heroism for the world at large. In this case, the true nature of the medal itself will be a secret from the person who owns it . . . since it will cause him to forget the decision to accept the medal's memory-absorbing properties!

Regaining Memories

How one can regain the memories taken by the Gold Circle -- if such a thing is even possible -- should be up to the GM. Some possibilities include:

- **Time.** They say time heals all wounds, and that given enough distance temporally between today and a horrific past, everything is bearable. If that is the case, then the medal could simply need a specific period of time -- be it one, two, or five decades -- before releasing its memories. Or maybe it requires a variable period of time; the medal may somehow just *know* when the recipient is able to handle the past, and allow the memories to return, either slowly or all at once.
- **Recreation.** By coming close to the circumstances of the original memory (either intentionally or accidentally), the memories may return. How close to those events the recreation must get is up to the GM; threatening to kill a friend (either for real or as an act) may spark the memory of the intelligence officer, for example. In general, unless the circumstances are *very* specific originally, the recreation probably needs to be specific itself; the person who poisoned a town's water supply should not regain his memory simply by pouring someone else a glass of water.
- **Be Polite.** Depending on what the GM decides the *true* nature or origin of the Gold Circle is, perhaps all that is required is for the hero to ask it for the memories back.. (Of course, that's presuming the medal isn't using those memories for some other purpose . . .)

Should it be possible to release lost memories, it is up to the GM whether or not wearing the medal is necessary. If it is, that makes reclaiming them much more deliberate and difficult an act. If it is not, then the GM will need to be much more arbitrary in deciding when or if the memories return.

If the memories *can* be returned, they can never be suppressed again, even if given another medal. Such are the sacrifices of heroes . . .

Story Ideas

- A new campaign could begin with each hero wearing one of the medals. If they know the true nature of the Gold Circle, they will probably wonder what they each did separately (or collectively!) to accept its offer. If they don't know the true nature of the Gold Circle, then learning that may pose its own challenges first . . .
- The heroes require the information of a war hero . . . information they are dismayed to learn has been absorbed by a medal! The heroes may find themselves in a race against time as they struggle to convince the Gold Circle recipient their cause is great enough to require the memories to return; then they need to figure out *how* to return the memories. And if the memories were horrible enough to want to suppress, how noble is it to require their resurgence in the hero, even if it is for the greater good?
- Similarly, the PCs may be approached by someone who finds himself hunted by person (or persons) unknown. But what could this decorated war hero *possibly* have done to earn his hunters' wrath? He certainly doesn't remember . . .
- And what if the memories contained within the medal can be transferred to someone *else*? Could a hero -- maybe the child or grandchild of the original recipient -- take the burden of such memories on himself for a greater good?

The Sacrificial Pistol

My Dearest Christopher,

*I'm so thankful you made it alive, although I would be lying if I said I weren't surprised. (Delighted, yes -- but surprised.) When I'd heard of the numbers lost or captured at Dieppe . . . well, your darling Anna had already begun to dread the worst. (I **am** still your darling, right?) I'm so glad you were able to stop those two Nazis . . . with a pistol, no less!*

However, my profound happiness is deeply tinged with sad news, I'm afraid. Your Uncle Lester and Aunt Day were in an automobile accident on August 19th. They didn't survive. I know you were never close, but such news can never be easy to take, especially so far from home . . .

The Sacrificial Pistol looks to be a perfectly serviceable -- if ordinary -- "last ditch" weapon. It certainly doesn't seem like it would be a weapon that would replace the standard issue rifle in effectiveness. But this is a gross underestimation. For the Sacrificial Pistol will, when used, automatically hit its target, dealing it a killing blow if remotely possible. (Thus most soldiers struck by the Pistol's bullet will fall, while shooting it at a tank will probably prove ineffective, as would firing it at an enemy beyond the bounds of its outmost range.)

The Sacrificial Pistol, however, is not without its grave price. For each life it takes, a family member or loved one of the user will die . . . immediately upon using the weapon. The Pistol starts by taking distant relatives first -- third cousins, distant aunts, and so on. But as the Pistol takes more lives, the threads it cuts draw closer to the wielder. A favorite uncle, a grandfather, a mother, a brother, a best friend, a child and wife . . . all will eventually fall through overuse of the Pistol.

Casualties caused by the Pistol's curse will not be obvious; its victims will appear to have simply stopped living. In the case of the infirm or elderly this probably won't be too unusual (death by "natural causes" will be common). And if the death happens at an inopportune moment -- like atop a building project or behind the wheel of a car -- the cause of the demise may well be obscured by incidental damage. (Of course, the direct victims of the weapon will appear -- correctly -- to have died from high-velocity lead poisoning.) Through enough uses of the Sacrificial Pistol, however, word should eventually get back to the holder, with enough clues to allow them to determine what has happened.

The Sacrificial Pistol is, otherwise, a completely ordinary weapon; it is not immune from the need to be reloaded, kept clean, and so on. Its power (and curse) lies within the weapon itself; its bullets can be transplanted to other pistols without any unusual effect. And the pistol cannot help but use its powers; shooting to wound is *not* an option. Those who use the Sacrificial Pistol too much may soon find themselves completely alone in the world. At this point the weapon, in effect, has no further curse; provided the holder doesn't love or befriend anyone, he may use the weapon -- and its awesome power -- without fear of reprisal. Although such a person devoid of all family, relations, and lovers may become an ideal soldier with an ideal weapon, none would willingly make such a choice . . . nor would those who might be close to the soldier. Tragically, too often this weapon finds itself firing true one last time.

Chris,

I know you and Anna were engaged, which is why it pains me to write this letter. But, as your father, I must . . .

Story Ideas

- The Sacrificial Pistol makes a horrific moral question: "What price power?" The wielder can almost certainly

become a battlefield butcher -- or even simply protect his own life at a most dire hour -- but not without a terrible cost.

- And if its nature is known, the decision to use it -- or not -- can be a terrible burden. What if two brothers, otherwise orphans, had the weapon and knew of its nature? Could one allow the other to go into battle, knowing that the weapon *will* save his life in an emergency?
- The heroes, under-equipped and starving, find a soldier in a village house, an apparent suicide victim. His journal details a growing depression, as more and more of his family dies mysteriously. Suddenly the village finds itself under attack by enemy forces! Can the heroes discern what is going on in time, and keep from making a devastating mistake?
- The government has need of an orphan soldier (one of the PCs) for an incredibly dangerous mission -- one which could determine the fate of the war. They are adamant that he only use this one pistol, however. What isn't the government telling him, and why does a befriended contact of the hero group die mysteriously shortly after the mission begins?

Tora! Tora! Tora! Tora! Alternate Pearl Harbors

"Yesterday, December 7, 1941 -- a date which will live in infamy -- the United States of America was suddenly and deliberately attacked by naval and air forces of the Empire of Japan.

The United States was at peace with that nation and, at the solicitation of Japan, was still in conversation with the government and its emperor looking toward the maintenance of peace in the Pacific. . . .

Japan has, therefore, undertaken a surprise offensive extending throughout the Pacific area. The facts of yesterday speak for themselves."

-- President Franklin D. Roosevelt, address to Congress, December 8, 1941

It is the sixtieth anniversary of the Japanese sneak attack on Pearl Harbor. Each of these castles in the air of entertainment builds on a foundation of tragedy -- but build we must, if we ever want to see anything but ruins. Like comedy, gaming about tragedy requires time, and time is what this column aims to provide. Four times, in fact, four alternate histories of varying weirdness, each one coming in low under the realism radar to hit history at its weakest point. In each, Pearl Harbor remains the irreducible target of multiversal aggression; awakening across time for its date with infamy.

"Placed in difficulties from which we could not extricate ourselves with honor and justice, compelled to immediate decision, and threatened with immediate hostilities we have, with the advice and consent of our chiefs, signed with heavy hand and many tears the deed of provisional cession and have permitted the British flag to be planted in all our islands, but under the guns of a frigate and at the point of the bayonet. Relying on the magnanimity and firmness of the United States, we appeal to the President . . ."

-- Letter of King Kamehameha III to President John Tyler, March 10, 1843

The analytical engines proved that Hawaii was no fluke. The Americans forced the British to back down over the Charlton Affair in 1843, but it was the Analytical Section that plotted the irreducible mathematical curve -- America already dominated Pacific trade, even before taking California from Mexico. The data didn't lie; the United States would surpass the entire British Empire economically by the turn of the century. This, needless to say, could not be countenanced. The Analytical Section provided massive covert aid to the Confederate rebels, which secured their independence at the cost of a short, sharp war in 1862. But rather than back down, the Yankees stepped up their maniacal growth. Without the South, pro-business and pro-technology forces in the Union had no opposition. Steamcars, railroads, nautiluses, aereons, and the entire panoply of mechanized industry and warfare poured from America's factories, their prosperity fueled by the China trade. British soldiers preserved the South, and kept India's riches flowing to Britain rather than America, but the harsh Babbage mathematics demonstrated that neither Confederate apartheid society nor the Empire could survive -- unless the United States was removed as a threat. On December 7, 1914, the dirigible fleets of the United Kingdom and the Confederate States launched a decapitating attack on the U.S. naval base at Pearl Harbor, and the Second War began.

This **GURPS Steampunk-World War II** campaign frame offers vast scope for nautilus naval action, for duels of land-ironclads in Texas and Tennessee, and for a rather more evenly matched superpower conflict than our history deployed. America's allies, Russia and China, offer mostly blood and bravery against the mechanized onslaught of the Three Empires (Britain, France, and Japan). The game can center on aerial daredevilry as G-8 and Biggles duel over Mexico, on elite units of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade dropped by aerostat into colonial rebellions from Indochina to Ireland, or on the increasingly mad science of Nikola Tesla and James, Lord Moriarty -- perhaps culminating in a race for the etheric bomb.

"Now is the only chance we'll have to destroy them . . . Once I've succeeded, everything's going to be all right. The earlier the move, the better the result."

-- "Jeen", *Mobile Suit Gundam I*

Between the first and second waves of planes, a lambent azure coruscation erupted on the tarmac at Hickam Field. A century and a half of redirected tachyonic energy transformed itself into 24 enormous figures clad in smooth, white armor emblazoned with the Rising Sun as the circuit closed from December 7, 2091 to 1941. The figures swept the

American forces off the island, and communicated their amazing story to Admiral Yamamoto -- they were "battlesuit troopers" from the future, who had traveled back to the past to win the Pacific War for Japan. Although their time had much advanced technology, their culture was dead and their spirit empty -- America had destroyed both. Their leader, Nishina Tetsuo, provided Japan's leading scientists with clues and even blueprints to a thousand amazing weapons from guided missiles to ceramic armor to atomic bombs. The battlesuits, of course, held secrets even more astounding -- which is what made the loss of one suit during an attack on the American rocket research center at Roswell, New Mexico, so annoying. Beaten and shoved back, the Americans feverishly reverse-engineer the futuristic equipment, desperately trying to invent their own future in time to inherit it. This **GURPS Mecha-World War II** crossover can be an exercise in bootstrapped battlesuit combat or a kind of retrotech *Reign of Steel* as the outgunned Americans take to the mountains against their unstoppable robot occupiers. For a twist, the PCs can be Time Patrolmen sent back to prevent Hitler from borrowing enough Japanese future technology to win in Europe, and to try and build a stable world from this mecha madhouse.

"It appears that King Kong, sensing the presence of his hated enemy, is determined to destroy Godzilla. Thus, a battle of the giants which may or may not have taken place millions of years ago may be recreated soon."

-- Dr. Arnold Johnson (Harry Holcome), *King Kong vs. Godzilla*

The Black Dragons had planned this attack for decades. Their oceanographers and historians had discovered the resting place of the King of Monster Lizards; the Japanese atomic project was diverted to producing a solution that would awaken him from his eons-long slumber. A dedicated minisub delivered the radioactive package to the volcanic vent, which detonated and raised Monster Island from the deeps. An Imperial Navy task force steamed east, its only mission to escort a specially-designed electrical lure to the Hawaiian coast. This lure drew the Monster Lizard into range of Pearl Harbor, where his stored aggression did the rest. The Imperial Navy finished what the gojirasaurus' fiery breath began, and sailed away again, confident that the Americans were finished in the Pacific. Now an army of radioactive monsters prepares to attack the West Coast as the Japanese go on to conquer Asia. Can the PCs in this **GURPS Atomic Horror-World War II** crossover game defeat the invasion from Monster Island? And what of the rumor that somewhere on a remote Pacific island shaped like a skull there lives a giant ape who can battle dinosaurs and win? Perhaps an elite ONI-OSS team of PCs must capture this super-gorilla and unleash the true King against the Emperor's radioactive reptile!

"We were young then, and we could slay dragons."

-- Nelda Brewer Roher, WAC (ret.), looking back on 1941

In retrospect, it was as if the gods were having their grim joke. The low-slung, deadly ships appeared out of nowhere on the bright winter's morning of December 7, 1591, dragon-heads weaving at their prows. But these were actual dragon heads, and the dragons took wing from the decks of the Nihonese armada and devastated the Vinlander entrepots at Perleshavn in Hovoe. Thus did Hideyoshi Toyotomi declare war on the Vinlanders, with a strike straight from the old sagas themselves. He wished a free hand in Kinland and the rest of the Peaceful Ocean, and only Vinland had the ships and the magics to harm him, for they had kept the ancient runes of Odin and the urge to sail the whale's road after their Norse kinsmen had turned to the White Christ and the distractions of Europe. But his dragons had missed the pride of the Vinlander fleet, the sacred ships where the mighty Valkyries slept. Hideyoshi also did not count on Vinland's allies the dwarves, who cast magic weapons by the cartload, or the Saracens who wove flying carpets in the Muslim districts of Vinland's cities. Their might, and Vinland's treasure, all the godhi freely pledged when next the Thing met. Under the great captains Halsi the Bull and Hosti Njemmisson, the Vinlanders are readying a mighty fleet to strike across the Peaceful Ocean and join up with the great warrior Arthursson in the Spice Islands. They will go a-viking right into the Inland Sea if they have to summon Surtur himself to scour the Nihonese cities clean.

This is a **GURPS Vikings-Alternate Earths 2-Japan-World War II** crossover, which can use any and all magic to taste. Japanese shugenja and Viking rune-magicians are probably the most common, but anything at all justifiable, from Arabian sorcerors to Aboriginal shamans to Taoist alchemists, can show up in this epic high fantasy setting. (If you want to enjoy a simultaneous war in Europe for the complete WWII feeling, you can pit Gardarika and Denmark against the suddenly-expansive Swedes and Sikellians.) Magic and late-Renaissance technology (including clockpunk wonderment from ninja war-kites to ironclad Korean turtle-ships) blend with dragons and oliphaunts for the proper free-wheeling feel. This is Ray Harryhausen's *Victory at Sea* and John Wayne's *Egil's Saga* where berserk meets

bushido in a battle to the death. Skoal!

Pyramid Review

Gear Krieg: Superscience!

Published by [Dream Pod 9](#)

Written by Alex Rhodes, Lloyd D. Jessee, Craig Youngblood, B. Scott Eggers, & Alex Koratzanis

Illustrated by Kieran J. Yanner, Bobbi Burquel, John Wu, Jean-Claude Delaronde, Alain Gadbois & Marcel Bastien

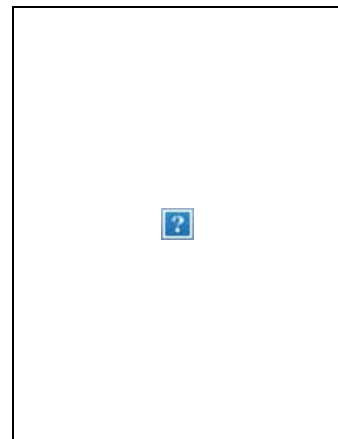
112 pages; \$19.95

Gear Krieg: Superscience is the first supplement for *Gear Krieg: The Roleplaying Game*, Dream Pod 9's game of "two fistful pulp role playing in a world at war!" -- itself the companion to their miniatures system that combines "mecha" with World War II. Describing itself as a "Roleplaying Supplement," this is the book that should cover one of the major facets of the *Gear Krieg* setting that received scant attention in the RPG rules -- Superscience!

Inspired by the works of H. G. Wells and Jules Verne and spurred on by the groundbreaking inventions of Thomas Edison and Nikolai Tesla, Superscience itself brings yet more groundbreaking theories and prototypes each day through the middle years of the 20th Century. The outbreak of World War II has further accelerated the pace of work across the world, in all scientific fields. The most notable of these is the construction of the walker by its American inventor, Walter J. Christie, during the twenties. Capable of wheeled on-road and walking off-road travel, these light vehicles have been taken up by the Third Reich as "Panzerkampfers" and employed effectively in the new German lightning war tactics. Tesla used his knowledge of electricity to install death rays in the French Maginot Line. As these electrostatic weapons were scaled smaller and became more efficient, the Soviets would install them into their tanks for use on the Eastern Front. Elsewhere advances were made in rocketry, materials sciences, and other technologies as the war called for weapons against which the enemy would have no answer.

The overall layout and style of the *Gear Krieg* line is neat, tidy, and easy on the eye, and *Superscience!* is no exception. Yet once you get into the book, both typographical and syntax errors make it hard to read. There are too many instances where upon reaching the end of a sentence, you are forced to go back and read it again because a misspelled word makes you ever so slightly unsure of the author's meaning. The effect of this off-kilter text is at first disruptive and then irksome as you once again have to scratch your head in wonderment at another sentence... This is not the only problem; for example, *Superscience!* cannot decide if it was Dr. Charles Monroe or Dr. Charles Munroe that pioneered the shaped explosive charge, nor if it was Igor Sikorsky or Igor Sikorski that pioneered the helodyne. The overall effect leaves the reader wishing that the book had been given one final good proofread before going to print.

Likewise, the standard of art in *Superscience!* is as good as the rest of the line, but there does not seem to be enough of it. Nor is this feeling helped with pieces having been reused from the pages of other *Gear Krieg* books. Many of the discussed vehicles are not illustrated at all, bar the data cards to be found in the book's appendix. These are not something to show to the players with the vehicle's statistics below, and are particularly unhelpful in the case of the helical aerodynes (*Gear Krieg*'s name for the helicopter). After all, how many characters are going to see one of these from the top down only? It would have been better if the new vehicles had been illustrated in the manner seen in the *Gear Krieg* book and *Gear Krieg Wargaming Companion*. One fact that should be noted about the great cover to *Superscience!* is that none of the aircraft shown appear between the covers, and one wonders whether this piece



should have been used on the cover of *Luftkrieg!* -- the *Gear Krieg* aircraft book instead.

The majority of *Superscience!* -- some eighty pages -- presents overviews of major fields of research in five chapters. The first of these, chapter two, is on Mathematical And Pure Sciences, covering computational machines, materials and synthetic sciences, plus atomics. Chapter three -- Electronic Sciences -- covers Tesla's electrostatic theories and weaponry developed for emplacements, radio, sensors (infrared, Radar and Sonar) as well as computers. The largest and fourth chapter is Mechanical Sciences. This describes the use of Tesla's weaponry mounted in tanks, walkers, automobiles and superheavy tanks, personal flight -- including jet packs and paragliders, helical aerodynes, VTOLs, motors, fixed wing aircraft, nautical vessels and rocketry.

In each of the chapters there are several pieces of color fiction, short biographies of notable figures within a field of study or those involved in running a particular project, and the occasional plot hook or adventure seed. Thus in the largest chapter on Mechanical Sciences we have short pieces of fiction about a helical aerodyne on a reconnaissance mission, a description of workarounds of the Russian T-43/E43 Tesla tank, and the rocket backpack used by the elite SS Rockettruppen. Also included are the biographies of Dr. Ferdinand Porsche, Preston Tucker, Howard Hughes and Dr. Robert Goddard amongst others.

The hooks and seeds include a paraglider-borne raid upon the Nazi rocket base of Peenemunde in Operation Thimble, investigating a giant transport submarine off the coast of Africa, and protecting Preston Tucker as he tests his new super fast walker on the Indianapolis race circuit. The majority of these hooks and seeds involve the application of these inventions, rather than their design or creation.

The fifth and sixth chapters depart from "normal" Superscience for the more outré subjects of Life Sciences and Paranormal Sciences respectively. Essentially Life Sciences is about the darker side of Axis science. It is here that Superscience looks at chemical and biological warfare, including Dr. Josef Mengeles, the Nazi breeding programs, and the Japanese Unit 516 and 713. Deplorable though this aspect of the war is, the book gives the basic facts without sensationalizing them. This fifth chapter also includes the only information directly applicable to the RPG: the alterations needed to be applied to a character's statistics to turn them into one of the chemically induced Axis zombies, and descriptions of a range of artificial limbs that whilst clunky, take the game towards the cyberpunk genre.

The sixth chapter on Paranormal Sciences can be roughly divided between Nazi occultism and the study of mind-over-matter powers. While mysticism underpinned much of Nazi ideology and deserves to be discussed here, overplaying of this angle may lead the GM to stray away from Superscience and towards something akin to Pinnacle's *Weird War II: Blood on the Rhine* or Pagan Publishing's *Delta Green* supplements.

The final and seventh chapter is on Gamemastering Superscience. Of its sixteen pages only two provide direct advice for the GM to introduce and run Superscience in their campaign. Though decent enough, the GM is still left wanting more. Much of this chapter is instead devoted to a sequence for creating prototypes or altering existing designs. This is best described as quick and dirty, and to get the best out of these rules, the GM will have to roleplay this out with their inventor or engineer player. Christie's design for the walker is written as an in-game example. The sequence is very vehicle orientated, but does cover the building of new personal weapons (more or less). This highlights a problem with Superscience in that it hardly covers personal weapons and equipment, which seems odd for a supplement for the roleplaying aspect of *Gear Krieg*.

This last chapter also provides us with the first look at examples of what actual characters look like under *Gear Krieg*'s Silhouette mechanics, an omission from the main rulebook. The six here are all archetypes based on individuals to be found in this supplement. Thus you have the Visionary Scientist, based on Nikolai Tesla; the Visionary Inventor, based on Walter J. Christie, inventor of the "walker"; the Mathematician, based on Alan Turing; the Engineer/Test Pilot, based on Igor Sikorsky; the Mechanical Genius, based on Preston Tucker; and the Philanthropist, based on Howard Hughes. All six are at least useful if the GM wants his players to meet these historical personalities, or wants the stats for an NPC of his own or even as an archetype for a player to model his character upon.

Superscience! does one thing very well, and that is provide an overview of the setting's technology. But beyond this it comes up rather short. Certainly for this type of book it seems odd that there is no bibliography for anyone who wants to do any further reading. Much of *Gear Krieg*'s science is based upon that of our own enough to warrant the inclusion

of suggested further reading. The book could have done with more illustrations of the items it describes and more archetypes for the players and GM to use -- whether that is a member of the elite SS Rockettruppen or a paraglider trooper of the 510th Daedalus Squadron. Plus there should have been some Superscience gear and weaponry for the individual character to use, when there is none! There is so little here that is directly applicable in terms of statistics to the *Gear Krieg RPG*, that to describe *Superscience!* as a roleplaying supplement is a little dubious.

Superscience! fills in some of the details the main rulebook left out, but in doing so it fails to support the roleplaying aspect of the game and makes it less value for money than it could have been. *Superscience!* is one for the dedicated *Gear Krieg* devotee or for someone who wants a rather general book of super science for another game.

--*Matthew Pook*

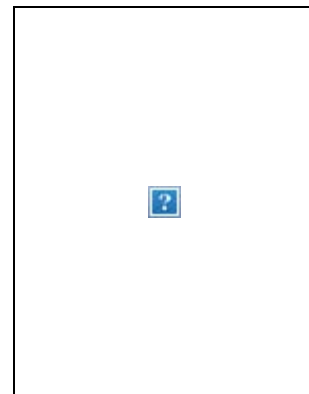
Pyramid Review

Battleforce Bravo: Wartime Adventure

Published by [Deep7](#)

Written and illustrated by **Todd Downing**

11-page PDF document; \$3.95



The design philosophy behind Deep7's "1PG" or "one-page" game is to create a simple RPG with rules that fit onto a single page and support the game with a number of scenarios that can each be played in a single evening. More specifically the rules are actually combined with the character sheet, so that onus is on the players to learn the rules as they create their characters, while the GM concentrates on running the adventure he has selected for that session. Finally, each 1PG game is electronically formatted as an Adobe Acrobat file and made available direct from the Deep7 website (www.deep7.com) for purchase and download. This all combines to keep the price down -- under \$5 each. The question is, can an RPG that costs as little as \$3.95 be any good, let alone fun?

Deep7 have released several games in this format, including the espionage themed *Agent S.E.V.E.N.*, the space opera *Star Legion*, and the game of pulp action, *Dime Heroes*. All of these are based on the type of pop-culture genres we have seen in movies or on television, making the concepts and conventions central to each game easy to grasp and understand. Their latest release does exactly that and is in keeping with this year's trend in RPG genres. *Battleforce Bravo* is a World War II beer & pretzels RPG based upon the type of heroic all-action movies put out by Hollywood: *Kelly's Heroes*, *The Sands of Iwo Jima*, *The Big Red One*, and *Force Ten From Navarone*.

Battleforce Bravo comes as an eleven-page 1.35 Meg PDF document. These pages are broken down into the cover and contents pages, followed by eight pages of game contents and rounded out with a single page of advertising for other Deep7 games. The document is both easy to read online and also to print out. It is art-light, with the single major piece being Todd Browning's cover which captures the spirit of the game. Elsewhere, the text is broken up by what appear to be small pieces of clipart. The gaming contents are further broken down into three single pages of rules and guidelines: a character sheet with everything that a player needs to know, the rules for the referee and a page of advice for the GM on how to run movie style adventures and combat. The remaining five pages each describe one adventure that can be played in a single evening.

Character generation is at most a five-minute job. 1d3 is rolled for each of the three attributes -- Sturdiness, Craftiness, and Brains. There are sixteen skills split between these three attributes, covering everything a character should need from fighting, drinking, shooting, gambling, repair, dodge and languages. The only skill that appears to be missing from the list is any kind of medical knowledge, but whether this should be added to the game or is instead covered by the "Repair" or "Tech Knowledge" is down to GM's choice. Each character receives 1d6 points to distribute amongst these skills, which all begin at zero and cannot rise above three. Then the four secondary attributes are rolled for -- Blood, Guts, Wits, and Notoriety. Blood represents hit points; once all are gone, the character is dead. Rolls against Guts determines if a character can keep their Wits when experiencing traumatic events -- failed Guts rolls decrease the Wits score until it is reduced to zero. At this point, the character is shell-shocked and traumatized, and will need to make a roll of four or less to be even able to attempt a skill roll. Notoriety is a measure of a character's reputation and can be used to re-roll failed skill checks or to call in a favor from an officer or supply clerk. Unfortunately, there is little information on how to handle this in the game, but any GM should be able to create their own modelled upon the simplicity of the other rules in *Battleforce Bravo*.

Two rolls are made for background (thug, civil servant, clergy, athlete, professional, college grad) before enlistment and actual status within the armed service appropriate to the scenario the GM has decided to run (battle-hardened,

hero, sharpshooter, specialist, NCO or commissioned officer). In general these add a few points to a character's skills, and possibly to their secondary attributes as well. Some options also include extra money. Both status and background rolls add a nice level of detail to characters, although a GM might want to create a few more as the six of each given within these rules are slightly limited.

In keeping with the concepts of simplicity behind IPG games, *Battleforce Bravo* uses a d6 for its core mechanic. You always succeed on a roll of a one and fail on a roll of six -- skill rolls are made against a combined total of the appropriate skill and attribute. Combat is equally as simple, with the Fighting skill covering both brawling and evading when in hand-to-hand. When guns are involved, the Shooting and Dodging skills cover weapons fire and evading it. Combat is also deadly, most characters start out with an average of twelve blood points, which is as much damage as a rifle round does. Some limited armor is available and reduces the amount of damage done by a weapons hit upon a location, meaning that if a GI is wearing his standard steel helmet, he has an armour value of ten on his head and can survive most headshots with a slight wounding! While combat is deadly, this is intentional, and *Battleforce Bravo* characters are not rolled up for the purpose of long-term play.

Despite the rules simplicity, some of the rules cover aspects of a WWII game better than several of the recent -- and supposedly more comprehensive -- RPGs. In particular the rules on Guts and Wits as well as the two rolls made for character status and background fall into this category.

Besides the single page of rules, the referee also has a page of advice on how to run the game. This is useful stuff, from suggesting how to get the players into the mood with the right movies and music to how to plot a scenario and handle the bad guts. None of this is ground-breaking material, but it does not need to be for a game like this.

Each of the game's five scenarios also fits onto a single page. Every scenario is well organized and begins with that adventure's Premise, which gives a quick description of the adventure. This is followed by the Setup, which contains important information for the referee. Three of the scenarios, "Zieg Heist," "Seabee!," and "Wild Dogs" are by Todd Downing, while Ron Dugdale co-authors the remaining two, Airmen Down and The Annabelle Lee.

[BEGIN SPOILER SPACE]

The first scenario is Todd Downing's "Zeig Heist," inspired by movies such as *Kelly's Heroes* and the more recent *Three Kings*. A disparate band of soldiers have the opportunity to leap ahead of the Allied front line and grab a fortune in diamonds worth a cool ten million dollars before the Nazis can retreat with it in their possession and their own side can catch up with them. In "Seabee!" US Navy engineers must defend the airstrip they just built on an island in the Pacific from a Japanese advance force. Unfortunately, reinforcements are not due for twenty-four hours and the Seabees must hold until the marines arrive to relief them.

The "Annabelle Lee" and "Airmen Down!" can be played as linked adventures, with the characters part of crew of a B-17 Flying Fortress. Inspired by films such as *Memphis Belle*, *12 O'clock High*, and even *Das Boot*, in "The Annabelle Lee" the crew must fly a dangerous daylight mission to hit a V1 launch site in northern France. This could be a one-way mission as wings of ME-109 fighters harry both the bomber and her escort of Hawker Hurricanes. This is the only scenario to add any significant rules to the game, with a simple set of air combat rules. Although suitable to play on its own, "Airmen Down!" can be run as a sequel to "The Annabelle Lee" in which a bomber is shot down and the aircrew must find their way back to the English Channel.

The final adventure, "Wild Dogs," is taken from *The Dirty Dozen* and is again something of one-way trip. Misfit soldiers are sent to hit a bridge in France and destroy an important German supply depot. In addition to these five scenarios, Deep7 have made available another scenario to download from their site. James Stubbs' "Verweigerter Falke" is the first to have the players take the part of Axis troops, as they too must strike at an enemy base from which British commandos are attacking the Germans in Norway.

[END SPOILER SPACE]

Players wanting more realism in their games should definitely look elsewhere, with perhaps Steve Jackson Games' own *GURPS World War II* their best choice. But with any IPG game the idea is to have fun, not to simulate real life or to

engage in deep angst-driven roleplaying, and ***Battleforce Bravo*** is no different. It offers a fast, action-filled gritty set of five evening's worth of entertainment, and that's without the GM writing more scenarios. So is the game worth the asking price? All right, if you exclude the price of printing out ***Battleforce Bravo***, then each scenario offers a session's play for eighty cents . . . and that can't be bad with a game as fun as this.

--*Matthew Pook*

Panzerschiffe Admiral Graf Spee

The Pocket Battleship

by **Kathryn Martens**

Many ships have earned a footnote in history; but perhaps only the *Titanic* and the *HMS Hood* have inspired more commentary with shorter life spans than the *Panzerschiffe Admiral Graf Spee*. From her secret beginnings to her enigmatic end, the *Graf Spee* lived only seven years. Yet in the intervening time she became the flagship of the resurrected German fleet, chalked up nine kills in less than three months in the Atlantic theater of World War II, and caused an international political standoff before she died. For a campaign set during or after WWII -- on *any* Earth -- this tiny warship offers a world of possibilities.

Origins Of An Enigma

After losing World War I, Germany was stripped of its navy by the Treaty of Versailles in 1919. Among the other restrictions of the treaty, Germany was barred from building any ship more than 10,000 tons. But the *Kriegsmarine* was resurrected in part upon a new, secret design in 1932: the so-called "pocket battleship." Small yet heavily armed -- the *Graf Spee* carried 11-inch guns, more appropriate to a ship twice her size -- the *panzerschiffe* ("armored ship") was rumored to be even faster than a battleship. Even the paint job made the pocket battleship a tough target; dark blue above and white-gray below, the *Graf Spee* sported a false bow wave that could make targeting difficult. Her camouflage was so effective that her own supply vessel once mistook her for an enemy ship. In addition to the *Graf Spee*, two other ships were built on this design: the *Deutschland*, and the *Admiral Scheer*.

All this worried the European militaries that had so recently subdued Germany. At the time very little was actually known about the new design, and even less was known about how many of them had been built. Most of the information available was mere rumor. British naval commanders got a look at one of the pocket battleships in 1937 when the *Graf Spee* participated in an international naval review to honor the coronation of King George VI of England. What they saw didn't reassure them.

In fact, much like UN inspections of today, the supervision of Germany's shipbuilding was less effective than it could have been. Germany was largely on its honor not to build above the limit. In reality she was 2,000 tons over the tonnage limit -- an extra 20%, mostly in guns.

But the pocket battleships had an Achilles heel: to keep their speed, they had to sacrifice weight. That meant thin armor plate. Less than a hand's breadth of steel separated the men aboard the *Graf Spee* from the prying eyes -- and waiting bombs -- of the Allies. This was a carefully guarded secret that went unrevealed until the death of the *Graf Spee*.

The Graf Spee

Work began on the *Graf Spee* in October 1932. By June 1934 she was finished. Originally called the *Ersatz Braunschweig*, she was commissioned as the *Panzerschiffe Admiral Graf Spee* on New Year's Day 1936. She was named for Vice-Admiral Maximilian Graf von Spee, who commanded the Far Eastern squadron of the German navy in World War I. Admiral von Spee was famous for the damage his squadron dealt to the French and British at Tahiti and Fanning Island, and especially for the defeat of a British cruiser squadron at Coronel. He was equally famous for his death at the Battle of the Falkland Islands, in which he was lost with his flagship *Scharnhorst*. The hopes of the German navy were lost with him. For the Germans it may have been an echo of greatness past to see his name emblazoned on a new warship.

It was also a shadow of things to come. The captain of the new ship, Hans Wilhelm Langsdorff, emulated the late Admiral; he aspired to live up to the famed commander's reputation for chivalrous behavior. By all accounts Captain Langsdorff succeeded in that mission. He also succeeded in his mission to disrupt the southern Atlantic shipping lanes.

The *Graf Spee* left Wilhelmshaven on August 21, 1939. On September 26, 1939, she was ordered to begin actions against British shipping in the Atlantic and Indian oceans. Barely four days later, she sank the *SS Clement*. In the following month she sank four more British freighters: *SS Newton Beech*, *SS Ashlea*, *SS Huntsman*, and *MV Trevanion*. She then moved to the Indian Ocean and sank *MV Africa Shell*.

By this time, newspapers in Europe and America both were screaming about the "phantom" raider. Fears began to build the single raider into an untraceable fleet. No fewer than four groups of capital ships were assigned to hunt her down, but at first it didn't help. In December 1939 the *Graf Spee* sank three more ships on her way back to Wilhelmshaven: *SS Doric Star*, *SS Tairoa*, and *SS Streonshalh*.

In less than four months of sailing, the pocket battleship had sunk nine British freighters -- 50,00 tons of steel and cargo sent to the bottom -- but with not one life lost. Captain Langsdorff was living the Admiral's chivalric code to the letter, and was taking crews off the ships before sinking them. At first he even tried to keep the vessels; the *Newton Beech* was kept on for a few days as a carrying vessel for the *Graf Spee*, as was the *Huntsman*. But the pocket battleship's greatest boon was her speed, and she could ill-afford a freighter slowing her down. Especially as four groups of cruisers closed in, she needed her prototype diesel engines to slip the noose.

The Battle of the River Plate

But with so many ships after her, it wasn't speed that failed her: it was simply space in the Atlantic. On December 13, 1939, the *Graf Spee* stumbled into the British cruisers *Ajax*, *Achilles*, and *Exeter*. A passage from Joseph Gilbey's book *Prince of Honor* conjures the scene: "A deafening explosion sends lethal particles of shrapnel and flying debris ricocheting off the ship's interior panels . . . Fire, fumes and flooding in darkened confined spaces summon terror to the survivors . . ."

During the battle the *Graf Spee* took a terrible hit in the thin armor of her hull. Her bow was opened to the sea. Even the ship's hospital flooded. Langsdorff visited his men by wading through seawater. Outnumbered and outgunned, the *Graf Spee* still managed to disable the *Exeter*; but the price was the critical hole in her hull and 100 dead. After viewing the damage, Langsdorff decided to run for Montevideo for repairs. She would never leave the port.

Montevideo

Montevideo is the interior port of Uruguay along the Rio de la Plata or River Plate ("Silver River"). The river forms the boundary between Uruguay and Argentina, both nominally neutral during World War II; in reality Uruguay was under considerable pressure from the British and the French. As soon as the *Graf Spee* made its surprise appearance in the harbor, the German Minister to Uruguay met her at the dock. His first words to Captain Langsdorff tell the story: "I wish I could say welcome to Uruguay, Gentlemen. You have made a serious error to bring your ship here seeking aid" (Gilbey).

Uruguay managed to hang on for four days. Intense international pressure -- and attention -- was brought to bear on the tiny country; but it had support from the still-neutral United States and from the Hague Conventions, which recognized the country's sovereign rights. But time simply ran out for the *Graf Spee*. The Hague Conventions only authorized a 24-hour respite for the combatant ship; her 72-hour docking had required a stay from the President of Uruguay himself. But his authority finally crumbled beneath unseen Allied pressure. With only a patch over the hole in her hull, the *Graf Spee* was ordered out of the harbor by 8:00 PM on December 17, 1939. Off the coast, three British cruisers waited for her.

The world listened to her departure with baited breath. A live radio broadcast reported the movements of the ship as she got under way at 6:45 PM. Everyone, including the German naval command, expected Captain Langsdorff to

bring his ship and his crew into the teeth of Hell. The only way to preserve the honor of the ship and her captain was to battle past the British cruisers or die.

A short while later, as the pocket battleship made her way into the wide estuary of the Silver River, a series of charges exploded in her belly. To the amazement of all she sank in shallow water. She remained intact, with much of her towering battleship profile above the waterline and in plain view of the coast. She had been scuttled.

The Price of Chivalry

Captain Langsdorff was trapped. A mere patch covered a gaping hole in the bow of his ship. Any attempt to reach the Argentine side of the estuary would be blocked by the British cruisers. Yet he couldn't surrender in Uruguay because of strict yet enigmatic orders from the German naval command. He saw one way out for his men. Unbeknownst to all but a few, Captain Langsdorff had argued persuasively with Uruguayan authorities that his crew were survivors of "shipwreck" and therefore should be given shelter in a neutral country. Arrangements were made for the secret transfer of his crew to merchant ships that were already in Montevideo; they sailed just a few minutes behind the *Graf Spee*. As the world watched the battleship sink in the harbor, the merchant ships carrying her crew were interned by Uruguayan officials -- but the crew was transferred safely to Argentina. Langsdorff had managed to follow his orders to the letter and still save the lives of his crew.

The price was his life and his good name. On December 19, 1939, Captain Hans Langsdorff committed suicide by gunshot in his room in the Naval Arsenal in Buenos Aires. He was found wrapped in his ship's flag. Publicly he was drummed for the loss of the vessel. The German naval command claimed that Langsdorff had disregarded orders by engaging in battle with warships. But at the same time a private letter praising Langsdorff was sent to his mother. Sixty years later, Langsdorff's career is still marred.

Present Day

The effects of the epic Battle of the River Plate and its aftermath linger even today. British veterans of the *Ajax* meet yearly. A Canadian town was named after the British cruiser; some of its streets are named after the ship's officers.

Veterans of the *Graf Spee*, who spent the rest of the war interned in Argentina, meet yearly in honor of Captain Langsdorff. The ship can still be seen in the shallow water of the River Plate; in the 61 years since her scuttling, she has sunk slowly into the soft mud at the bottom of the estuary.

Using the *Graf Spee* in Gaming

There are two things to keep in mind about gaming in the era that spawned the *Graf Spee*. First, the concept of honor still had a powerful hold on all the combatants -- even the Germans. That they remained fairly close to the weight restrictions imposed by Versailles even without strict supervision is a telling point. That the world trusted them to do so is also telling. This lends itself far better to a pulp ethos rather than gritty, cynical *Shadowrun*-type gaming. Spy games were simply different then; there is a reason that Ian Fleming thought of his spies as wearing business suits. But once a ship put out to sea, a land-based information hunt by government agents was the only way to find out exactly what their navies were up against. Intrigues with foreign governments, help from unlikely sources, and legwork at strange ports of call were all part of the process of tracking wolves at sea, and can all make for spectacular gaming even without grit.

That said, the second thing to keep in mind was that honor only went so far. The *Graf Spee* could have been *ten* ships for all that the Allies knew about her, and had the Germans been able to make ten of her, they would have. In an Alternate Earth, perhaps they did. Where would Britain -- and by extension Europe, perhaps even the world -- be if her shipping had been hit by a grand total of 30 pocket battleships instead of three? In a Weird game setting, what if the Germans produced ten *exact copies* of the *Graf Spee* and her crew? How eerie would it be to come face to face with the ship you just sank last week . . .

The *Graf Spee* was a prototype ship, and her brief honors showed it. She did not remain the flagship of the German fleet for long -- in fact, the honor had been moved to another ship before the war had broken out. It was also reflected in her captain and crew; while everyone aboard was experienced (Langsdorff himself was a veteran of the Battle of Jutland), no one was irreplaceable. This is a familiar situation to paranoid players. The campaign needn't be aboard the *Graf Spee* herself; this sort of situation is perfect (and evil) for nearly any set of experienced PCs at the next step in their development as a group. It's certainly a reward to be given your own ship -- but the responsibility and the fear inherent in being given a terrible duty *and* a ship with a fatal flaw makes for heady gaming. The world at large expects the PCs to do something interesting with their secret gear; the question is whether they will do something expected.

Conversely, it may be the PCs' stern duty to hunt down the phantom raider. They may be sailors and officers aboard the hunting ships. They may be part of the network of listening posts that protected the American shoreline from her predation. More interestingly, they may be agents from any of the Allied or South American governments that flooded Montevideo to jockey for position around the *Graf Spee* and her fate. (Remember that during the war James Bond himself served in the Royal Navy . . .)

Intrigue also abounds in her crew's enigmatic orders not to surrender to Uruguay. Perhaps the *Kriegsmarine* worried about the unfettered access that British and French agents might have to the crew of the *Graf Spee* in that country. Perhaps the crew had something even more precious than diesel engines to hide. Alternate Earth campaigns may well have an interesting time saving her from her fate -- or, perversely, helping her meet it more quickly. Who is to say that those engines were just diesels? Perhaps Captain Langsdorff never intended to scuttle her in such shallow water, or even to scuttle her at all . . .

If nothing else, the *Graf Spee* can serve as an amazing part of the landscape of any Earth campaign. Secret salvage missions aboard a half-sunken battleship in the dead of night in South America sound like something straight out of a pulp adventure novel. As late as 1948 her foretop still showed above the water of the estuary and her interior was accessible in shallow water -- and by that time, a young Frenchman named Jacques Cousteau had already been using his revolutionary aqualung for five years.

Be it the thrill of the chase or the intrigue of her death, whatever their connection with the *Graf Spee* practically all gamers will find something enthralling about her. Sixty years later, men are still trying to clear her tragic captain's name -- and who is to say that the ship herself doesn't still hold secrets?

Statistics:

Displacement: 12,000 tons (16,000 fully loaded)

Dimensions: 598 x 68 x 23 ft

Propulsion: 8 diesel engines, 2 shafts, producing 54,000 hp

Top Speed: 28 knots (approximately 32 mph)

Crew: 1,150

Armament: 2 triple 11-inch guns; 8 single 5.9-inch guns; 6 single 4.1-inch guns

Armor: 1.5-4 inch belt, .75-2.25 inch deck, 5.5 inch turrets

Sources

- *Prince of Honor*, by Joseph Gilbey

This book "details the Battle of the River Plate (*HMS Ajax*, *HMS Achilles*, and *HMS Exeter* against *Panzerschiffe Admiral Graf Spee*); documents *Spee's* raider cruise and scuttling in Montevideo; explains the evacuation of *Spee's* crew to Buenos Aires and Captain Langsdorff's suicide." Its website is at

www.grafspee.com

- feldgrau.com

Information on the Graf Spee is listed under the "Most Requested" heading in the Kriegsmarine section. Feldgrau bills itself as "the premier website on the German Armed Forces from 1919 to 1945."

- *Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2000*
- *pangeopolis.com*

A good illustration of the *Graf Spee* by George Silvaney is at http://www.pangeopolis.com/graf_spee.html

Spanish language websites

- http://www.granavenida.com/casusbelli/mar/graf_spee.htm

Many webpages on the *Graf Spee* are from South America. This one includes an impressive photograph of her from the bow, showing her false bow wave to great effect. It also includes a photograph of Captain Langsdorff's tomb, "que siempre tiene flores."

The World War II Before World War II

First off, let me say that it's **really** surreal to think of World War II as something that happened *last* century.

Second off, let me say that World War II, as a historical event, really doesn't have any personal attachment for me. Which is to say that I don't know have any anecdotes, know of any family members who were involved (directly or indirectly), or can otherwise point to the Big One as having a major influence on my life. Now, that's not to say it *hasn't* . . . my family has an odd tendency of being either distant or departed, so even though I don't know of any stories, I'd be shocked if there weren't any. Thus if ignorance is bliss, I'm clearly all a-giggle.

So with that in mind, I generally tend to think of WWII mostly in detached terms. For example, I credit WWII with introducing me to gaming. My earliest gaming memory is when I was seven, playing an Avalon Hill game with my stepdad (it was an older naval battle game with little metal submarines; its name eludes me, but I'm sure the Giant *Pyramid* Think Tank knows right which one I'm talking about). Now, I'm reasonably sure that World War II wasn't fought *just* so I'd have a future hobby and job, but that's my earliest association.

But most recently I've come to consider: What was World War II before World War II?

In other words, what was the conflict that completely reshaped the world -- and future history -- before World War II? (I'm sure it could theoretically be an "event," but traditionally humanity has melded "event" and "world reshaping" into "war.") What was the event where everyone knew of someone that was affected by it?

After giving it some thought (and keep in mind this may well be common thought, but it's pretty deep for me since I'm an English/CompSci geek and these thoughts involve history, which is just a smidge below my "Spice Girl Lore") I decided that the pre-WWII earth-shaking conflict was the Napoleonic War. It occupies a place chronologically just over a century before World War I, and certainly seemed to shake things up. (Of course, I'm stuck in my Eurocentric rut here . . . heck, given enough time I'm sure I can relate how Florida is the center of all geopolitical developments for the past thousand years.)

And before that? Um . . . I'm at a loss, historically, 'til the Crusades, which fits my person definition of "huge war involving almost everyone that really shakes everything up."

But there may well have been others.

Anyway, the point of all these long, random thoughts (and, yes, there *is* a point) is that, although many people -- myself included -- tend to think of World War II as this gigantic event, epic in scale and global in reach. But many people also tend to think that World War II was unique in the way it touched the world; I'm not sure I agree with that. I don't think people of the 1850s were sitting around thinking, "Wow; nothing has ever happened globally that's happened me, my parents, or my grandparents. Sure hope we never have a world war or nothin'." In its own way, the world has *always* been small; whether the struggle lasted five years or a thousand, I think there long since been wars that have touched the world. (Or at least the *known* world . . . it's hard to consider that you're not affecting a continent you've never even discovered.)

And to tie it into gaming (gadzooks!), when I'm designing campaign worlds from scratch I try to remember this fact. Okay; there was an epic War of Tears that engulfed the entire realm into its clutches. Soooo . . . what else? What was the worst war the world has ever known before that? What was the defining conflict that everyone talked about *before* the War of Tears? Although time *is* linear, and seems to have a distinct starting point, in most campaigns removed from (say) *GURPS Ice Age* there will be a sense of history. And from that sense of history and perspective can emerge a richer, more textured world. After all, saying that an artifact is hundreds of years old doesn't have as much impact as saying it was originally discovered by Napoleon's armies in Egypt . . . *or* the Hidden Vale's epic 10,000 man assault on Madeupia.

And if there truly isn't an epic battle before your War of Tears (or whatever), maybe you should consider playing that

up. There has *never* been a conflict of that scale. There are no records, no stories, no folklore of that magnitude. Perhaps the world couldn't even *imagine* such a conflict was possible . . .

Or perhaps such conflicts were relegated in the past to seven-year-old children and their parents, pretending to fight bloodless battles on a clean map representing the world.

--Steven Marsh

* * *

*Last week's answer: **Star Crusade 2: Lost Worlds**, p. 50.*

(Two stars) "In this package, you get . . .

1. 2-panel keeper's screen tailored for Antarctica
 2. Embroidered full-colored Starkweather-Moore expedition patch: suitable for cap or jacket
- . . ."*

Designer's Notes: GURPS World War II

by Gene Seabolt

After a considerable period of building tensions, the Second World War brewed up suddenly and quickly blossomed into the largest conflict in human history. Perhaps fittingly, *GURPS WWII* followed a similar course on its way to your local game store.

The idea of a *GURPS* sourcebook for WWII had been sitting on the back burner for years before I first reopened the topic in 1999. My proposal for a strictly historical sourcebook met with a wide variety of spirited feedback. This administered the first difficult lesson of this process, which was that different people have very different concepts for what a WWII sourcebook should be. Regardless of the details of those various visions, the consensus seemed to be that a sourcebook worthy of *GURPS* would not limit itself to a straight history lesson. With this and a few other sweeping revisions to ponder, as well as increasing duties in *GURPS Traveller*, I moved WWII to my back burner, as well.

Early this year, the opportunity presented itself to again revisit the idea of a WWII sourcebook, and a continuing line stemming from that. Steve gave the project a green light, and a short time later Creative Director Phil Reed asked for a Dec. 7 deadline, for obvious marketing reasons. That left a window of a little over six months to go from concept to finished product, a tall order but not an impossible one.

Laying the Groundwork

The first order of business was creating the modular vehicle-design system that former Managing Editor Alain Dawson and I had decided would be a good tool for increasing the book's cross-genre support. As editor on *GURPS Traveller Ground Forces*, I had found David Pulver's modular system in that book a vast improvement over flipping through *GURPS Vehicles* seeking those portions that specifically applied to the Traveller universe.

I held no illusions that a comparable WWII system could be as reader-friendly. To begin with, things get a lot more complicated when describing more than one mode of movement. (The *Ground Forces* grav vehicles fly. That's it.) More importantly, the WWII system had to provide results at least within hailing distance of a reality that isn't always defined in *GURPS* terms. For instance, many sources list the top speed for the infamous Tiger tank at 23 mph, but more detailed accounts explain that the tank actually could reach 28 mph although one didn't want to make a habit of driving at that speed. (Unless, of course, one really enjoys swapping out 1-ton powerpacks in the rear areas of a combat zone.) Thus, the "real" top speed usually given for a Tiger doesn't actually coincide with what *GURPS* considers top speed -- and never mind that no real-world statistic is going to give a very good idea of what the stability rating should be. Furthermore, real-world statistics aren't nearly as consistent as those derived from *Vehicles* -- the design system would have to be sufficiently fuzzy to allow for this.

Armed with a mountain of real-world data, I began building a modular system that recognized it couldn't be real simplistic when it came to determining final performance statistics, but tried to make up for it by being as simple to use as possible before then. In this vein, I unashamedly swiped the old *Car Wars* method of applying armor to vehicles, as well as its fixed menu of several predefined chassis. Boiling down and condensing the pertinent *Vehicles* content through the rest of the process, I ended up with a first-draft system that (as far as I could tell) was internally consistent but had only passed a few rough reality checks. Deadlines only know one mode of travel -- rushing forward remorselessly -- and mine certainly didn't lack for speed, so it was time to begin playtest and let fresh sets of eyes improve the process.

The Brouhaha Begins

As many Pyramid readers know, we originally intended to post the *WWII* playtest files as PDFs of the already laid-out pages ready to go to the printer. This wasn't because we couldn't post the extracted text, but because it's a lot easier to

read content that's already been paginated. However, posting a preformatted and printable version of a product we had not yet brought to market struck us as pushing our luck a bit much -- not that we don't trust the vast majority of our audience, but the old saw about one bad apple certainly would apply here. So, we posted the content with the option to print disabled. It took many playtesters about 1.7 seconds to circumvent that precaution, but others who didn't like being forced to read the content on their screens voiced their displeasure.

That protest went hand in hand with the even larger controversy being generated by playtesters who didn't think that *WWII* should have a modular-design system. They had valid points, but the reality remained that the design rules took up 1% of the space that it would take to properly describe every WWII-era vehicle in which players might take an interest *and* provided the tools for GMs and players to stretch their imaginations in the time-honored *GURPS* tradition. The old saw that applies this time would be the one about giving a fish or teaching how to fish; even after weighing the dissenters' arguments, I had no doubt that the design system would be an asset for the book.

Others, meanwhile, were protesting that *GURPS WWII* should be more of a strictly historical book -- describing something very much along the lines of my 1999 outline. I had to turn down this opportunity to gloat, because I already had admitted to myself that the earlier feedback expanding *WWII*'s vision had been correct, and that a sourcebook supporting a wider breadth of genres would be the better product, even if it did risk offending some purists.

Finally, we recognized that *Pyramid* playtests were starting to show a great deal of hard-to-digest, back-and-forth discussion, and that WWII was a topic with plenty of often opposing viewpoints to generate debate. So we asked playtesters to follow some new ground rules to minimize the noise-to-signal ratio. While most playtesters understood the needs expressed by these rules (for which I'm eternally grateful), a few voiced their displeasure with these new restrictions, as well.

Heaping these controversies atop one another, *WWII* certainly was gaining attention, though not of a sort of which I was particularly fond . . .

Apocalypse in 100 Words or Fewer

Meanwhile, I was madly at work on the rest of the book. As daunting as the vehicle system had been to that time, the historical passages in Chapter 1 proved no less challenging. A war that spans more than five years and scores of countries does not lend itself to brevity. Balancing theater against battle against anecdote, I assembled an overview that felt fairly complete, but still left plenty of room for additional books in the line to expand upon various topics.

Chapter 2 didn't give me a break, either. I wanted to compare the armed forces of the major combatants in a strictly organized, apples-to-apples fashion, beginning with a comprehensive review of the general Western military structure (for which I brazenly cribbed the concept from GDW's *Striker*). This should have been easier than it was, but I discovered that -- among the thousands of references on WWII -- very few actually approach the military mechanics without basing the discussion on an existing (and undescribed) body of knowledge for fellow military professionals. Neither being such a professional nor writing for them, I had to tackle the topic largely from scratch, but came away largely satisfied with the results.

The next step was creating the small-arms lists for the book, for which I turned to one of the *GURPS* community's resident experts, Hans-Christian Vortisch. While Hans-Christian and I can't always agree on the time of day (even allowing for the time-zone differential between Austin and Germany), I wasn't about to leave his vast storehouse of knowledge untapped. Based largely on his invaluable work, we put together a weapons list that passed through playtest with just a handful of modifications. Meanwhile, longtime WWII campaigner and indispensable resource Shawn Fisher provided the vast equipment list that begins the chapter.

Return of the Modular System

It was now time to return to the modular system and address the mountain of problems that playtesters had discovered. *Vehicles* expert Kenneth Peters did more than his share of work in this venue, and came up with a particularly elegant

modification of the airplane-design system that worked wonders on the system's inconsistencies. A great deal of additional input was incorporated into the design system's final form. (The only major exception would be the suggestion that varying frame strengths be offered, because it would have opened a Pandora's box of wildly ahistorical design possibilities and added a good deal of complexity.) David Pulver was, of course, of immense aid in finalizing and tweaking the content, and in keeping an eye on the potential ramifications of applying the upcoming *Vehicles Expansions* to *WWII*.

With a tighter, better design system in hand, it was time to put it to the best test by designing the corebook's sample vehicles with it. The first handful of vehicles went surprisingly well in the design system, but proved that I had grossly underestimated the amount of space each vehicle would take up in print. Painfully, I had to cut some writeups, such as the legendary Japanese battleship *Yamato*, to make room for staple gear.

Overall, though, the samples validated the playtest-purified design system quite nicely -- until I got to looking at the long-established *GURPS* vehicle-combat system summarized in the book. *Vehicles* has always overvalued the penetrating power of TL6 weaponry vs. TL6 armor in comparison with the historical. I had previously joined Mr. Pulver in hand-waving this by explaining that, even if a shell did not technically pierce real-life armor, it still did real damage to the vehicle overall. (A radio bolted to a bulkhead when a 50mm round smacks the other side probably won't work too well afterward . . .) This after-the-fact justification worked just fine, until Mr. Vortisch insisted that the major combatants incorporated explosive charges in most of the armor-piercing rounds listed as strictly AP today. Modeling an APEX round as penetrating armor before going *bang!* isn't quite as justifiable as modeling a solid piece of shot penetrating armor that it shouldn't penetrate.

With this in mind, we reapproached the *Vehicles* benchmark of 1" of hard steel equaling DR 70. Previous vehicle designs have taken this to mean armor-quality steel, but taking the conversion at face value, could we model better grades of *Vehicles* armor as face-hardened varieties with better performance per inch than strictly "hard steel?" Our research indicated we could nicely fit that assumption into the design system, and with some tweaks to the cannon designs to make them more historical, we ended up with a system that finally allows a Panther to bounce off its nose the 75mm shells from a standard Sherman.

The Complete Package

At this point, things were moving along well. Steve had read the book and applied his own formidable knowledge of the topic to it. So had our resident WWII grognard Loren Wiseman -- it shames me to no end that I forgot to credit his informal aid to the process in the book -- and other SJ Games stalwarts had reviewed various passages. The December 7 release date that we had been trumpeting was fast arriving, and lots of people outside the usual *GURPS* sphere were expressing interest in the book.

This interest, coupled with the fact that a workable vehicle-combat system already was included in the book, led me to suggest that we expand the page count to include a WWII-specific version of the popular *GURPS Lite* condensed rules. Steve agreed to the change, and *GURPS* Line Editor Sean Punch did his usual exemplary job of crafting a succinct set of modern-combat rules in record time. Incorporating material scattered among various other *GURPS* supplements, this version of *Lite* will be handy to experienced *GURPS* players and newcomers alike, in my opinion. Regardless, it transforms *GURPS WWII* into a stand-alone game package, and hopefully one that will attract new players to an outstanding game system. Its last-minute inclusion transformed a smooth process into our usual last-minute scramble to get the book ready for the printer, but it was well worth it.

The Outcome

While reader feedback will be the ultimate jury, of course, a lot of talented people around here -- with myself as no more than ringleader among them -- have created what I think is an outstanding addition to the *GURPS* library and a promising start to what promises to be an exciting line. Certainly, the book's creative process generated more than its share of tension, but I'll ask forgiveness for any missteps there and ask Pyramid's audience to evaluate the book on its own merits. We'll get things smoothed out and look to improve as the line moves along.

Duh.

Murphy's Rules



by John Kovalic

Murphy's Rules



Murphy's Rules



The Lost City of Chichén Itzá

by Sean Robson

For many days they made their way along rivers and narrow mountain paths in the hot and humid Honduran rain forest. Their native guides led them ever deeper into the jungle, struggling through the mud bearing heavy loads of equipment, tormented by the incessant stinging of mosquitos. The shrill cries of birds and howls of monkeys filled the stifling air by day, and the hoarse roars of prowling jaguars punctuated the silence at night. Before them lay the city, lost and forgotten, swallowed by the jungle it once dominated. Its crumbling temples and palaces were worn down by centuries of tropical rains, pried apart by ever questing roots and overgrown by vines, ferns and shrubs. Stone effigies of alien gods glared out at the fallen ruins from beneath a verdant shroud of moss and lichen, with no one left to worship them.



Such must have been the experience of John Lloyd Stephens, an American lawyer/diplomat, and Frederick Catherwood, an English artist, when they found the ruined Mayan city of Copán in 1839. Their subsequent trips over the next couple of years yielded more than three dozen lost cities and heralded the rediscovery of the ancient Mayan civilization by modern man.

The Mayan civilization originated in the Yucatán around 2600 BC, and rose to prominence around AD 250, reaching its peak in the early 9th century. The Maya's ancestors are believed to have migrated from North America, though several 19th century writers suggested that the Maya were the descendants of lost Atlantis. The Maya, building upon earlier civilizations such as the Olmec, developed highly sophisticated hieroglyphic writing, astronomy and calendars. They had a hierarchical system of government, ruled by kings and nobles, organized into highly structured city-states during the Classic period (AD 200-900). Shortly after AD 900 Mayan civilization began to decline for reasons unknown. The southern Maya began abandoned their cities, apparently quite suddenly, as unfinished buildings and carvings dating to this time have been found in many southern ruins. This decline did not seem to reach the northern Maya; quite the contrary. In the Puuk region and at Chichén Itzá, the cities flourished, displaying some of the finest architecture in the pre-conquest New World. The cause of the downfall of the southern Maya is a mystery, but many archeologists suggest the following factors as contributing to the collapse: 1) constant internecine warfare between city-states, 2) drought, 3) overpopulation. It is likely that these three factors combined to destabilize the underpinnings of Mayan society, waiting only for an ill-timed catastrophe, such as a rebellion by the starving masses against an oppressive ruling class, to trigger the collapse.

About one hundred years after the demise of the southern Maya, civilization in the Puuk region began to collapse, again, for reasons unknown. Once again, Chichén Itzá, inexplicably immune to the downfall of Mayan civilization, continued to flourish and grow in strength, becoming the largest and most powerful Mesoamerican city of its day. It remained a bastion of Mayan culture until integrated into Toltec society around AD 1200. Mayan civilization persisted in some peripheral centers until the Spanish conquest of the early 16th century.

Mayan Periods

Preclassic	Early	2000-1000 BC
	Middle	1000-300
	Late	300-AD 250

Classic	Early	250-550
	Late	550-800
Terminal Classic		800-1000
Postclassic	Early	1000-1250
	Late	1250- Spanish Conquest

Religion

There were many Mayan gods, including deities of death, war, winds, rain, corn, and the North Star. The exact number of gods is unknown, but among the most important were Itzamna, K'uk'ulkan, and Chac. Itzamna, the Supreme God and world creator was a kindly god, but remote from everyday life, and used other gods as intermediaries. K'uk'ulkan, the wind god, was a great feathered serpent, and is synonymous with the Aztec god, Quetzlcoatl. Chac, the rain god, was of great importance in the agrarian Mayan society. The Maya believed that the gods guided the sun and moon across the sky, and also believed that they needed human assistance in the form of sacred rituals. Such rituals involved bloodletting to nourish and propitiate the gods. Blood sacrifice was thought to send human energy skywards, and divine power was received in return.

Kings used obsidian knives or stingray spines to cut their penises, allowing the blood to fall onto paper held in a bowl, while queens pulled barbed cords through their mouths, lacerating their tongues - which goes to show there was a downside to being royalty. Human sacrifice was regularly performed on prisoners, slaves, and illegitimate children. Priests were assisted by 4 elder men, known as chacs in honor of the rain god Chac. These men would hold the arms and legs of the victim while another person, called a nacom, opened up the chest and removed the heart. A shaman known as a chilam stood near by in a trance, to receive messages from the gods, which were interpreted by the priests.

The Mayan codices record repeating cycles of creation and destruction, which served as a reminder of the consequences of failing the propitiate the gods. The start of each 52 year cycle was a frightening time when gods and other forces of creation and chaos would do battle in the mortal world, determining the fate of earthly creatures. Such cycles continue until the end of the world, which, according to the Mayan calendar, is due to occur December 22, 2012.

Codices

Mayan glyphs were painted on codices made either of deer hide or bleached fig tree paper that was then covered in thin coat of plaster and folded accordion style. The codices recorded rituals, chronologies, calendars, and astronomical data outlining the cycles of Venus and other celestial bodies. Most Mayan codices were burned by the Spanish in the 16th century when attempting to convert the Maya to Christianity. A zealous Franciscan friar, Diego de Landa was a missionary in the finest traditions of the Inquisition. He traveled throughout the Yucatán on a mission to destroy all vestiges of Mayan religion, and often resorted to torture to gain converts. On July 12, 1562, enraged by the stubbornness of the Maya, he ordered a repository of hieroglyphic books burned. He wrote that because the books "contained nothing in which there was not to be seen superstitions and lies of the devil, we burned them all..." Four pre-Hispanic Codices survive:

The Dresden Codex was written at Chichén Itzá between AD 1200-1250. The 78-page codex contains almanacs, accountings of days, predictions, tables of eclipses and movements of Venus as well as prophecies, and is 3.5 m long when unfolded. It was used to predict the future, and to time raids, captures, and warfare with the appearance of Venus.

The Madrid Codex, also called the Tro-Cortisano Codex, is 112 pages long and contains religious writings and

predictions.

The Paris Codex, also called the Peresano Codex, is 22 pages long and contains predictions and a calendar.

The Grolier Codex was discovered in the 1970's and displayed at the Grolier Club in New York. It was found in a wooden box in a cave in the Chiapas. It consists of half of a 20-page table concerned with the movements of Venus, and is dated to AD 1230.

In addition to the Codices, there are several other post-conquest texts written in Spanish by Mayan authors attempting to preserve their rapidly vanishing heritage. A few such manuscripts include the Popol Vuh, a fragmentary text from the Guatemalan highlands recording the myths, cosmology and traditions of the Quiché Maya; the Annals of the Cakchiquels; and the Books of Chilam Balam, named after an order of Jaguar Priests renowned for their skill in prophecy. Any of these texts could contain valuable troves of forbidden lore.

Warfare

The Maya were obsessed with war. There was constant inter-tribal battle among the highlanders in the south, and the city-states of Yucatán were perpetually at war with one another. By the late Classic Period warfare had become institutionalized and included a military elite, professional warriors, and expanded military objectives such as the conquest of neighboring cities, control of natural resources, and domination of trade routes. In addition to professional warriors there were common soldiers conscripted from the peasantry, and scouts called zabin ("road weasels") who were used to gather information about enemy defenses. War leaders were particularly honored in Mayan society, but were required to abstain from sexual relations, eating meat, or drinking alcohol for the duration of their tenure. These restrictions were bound to make one frustrated and irritable, which, perhaps, was the general idea.

Classic Period weapons were limited to short spears tipped with flint or obsidian points, wooden clubs, flint or obsidian knives, and shields. In the Postclassic Period, when warfare had become a more important societal institution, there were numerous additions to the Mayan arsenal, likely obtained from the Aztecs in Mexico, which included: atlatls, slings, obsidian edged macuitls, short bows, and cuirasses of quilted cotton or tapir hide.

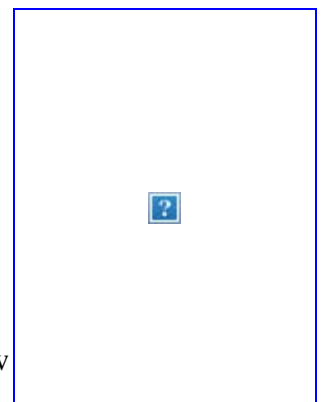
Sixteenth century Spanish accounts tell of encounters with Maya soldiers -- their bodies painted red and black, adorned with plumed helmets and lavish costumes, carrying brightly colored standards, and charging into battle amid the din of drums, conch shell horns, whistles, and war-cries. Their battle tactics focused on ambushes, frontal assaults, and flanking maneuvers with an initial missile barrage, which quickly devolved into hand-to-hand combat. The primary goal was to capture rather than kill the enemy; common soldiers were enslaved, while officers and nobles were reserved for sacrifice.

The Ruins of Chichén Itzá

The word Chichén Itzá is derived from Chi, meaning "mouth," and Chen, meaning "well," and literally translates as "mouth of the well of the Itzá," referring to the city's sacred sacrificial well (cenote).

Sacred Cenote

Cenotes are natural wells formed by karstic sinkholes in limestone that extend to the water table, and were important sources of drinking water for most Mayan cities. The Sacred Cenote at Chichén Itzá measures 200 ft (61 m) across, and its limestone walls rise 65 ft (20 m) above the surface of the water. The Sacred Cenote can be entered through a vertical hole, with narrow steps carved in the limestone. The air is thick, musty, and oppressive, and one misstep on the slimy ledge can send an explorer plummeting into the well. Within the well, blood red stalactites and tree roots reach down from the ceiling, and in the center lies a deep pool of blue green water. A massive stalactite hangs down to within inches of the pool's surface, and a piercing beam of light from the ceiling illuminates



[Click to enlarge](#)

the pool and the entire chamber.

The Sacred Cenote was believed by the citizens of Chichén Itzá to be the abode of gods, most especially of Chac, who dwelt within the depths of the pool. Many of the stalactites have been carved in the likeness of suckered tentacles, and gold Chac masks adorn the walls.

Down through the centuries a foreboding aura of mystery and evil has clung to the Sacred Cenote. When John Lloyd Stephens came upon it, he found it repulsive and described it as "the largest and wildest we had seen, with cragged, perpendicular sides, trees growing out of them and overhanging the brink, and still as if the genius of silence reigned within. A mysterious influence seemed to pervade it, in unison with the historical account that the well of Chichén was a place of pilgrimage, and that human victims were thrown into it in sacrifice."

An early Spanish report noted that Maya lords had hurled women belonging to them into the well with instructions to find out from the gods below whether the forthcoming year would be a good one. They also threw precious stones and gold down the well in sacrifice to the gods.

The Great Ballcourt

Chichén Itzá's ballcourt is the largest of all Mayan ballcourts, measuring 545 ft (166 m) long by 225 ft (69 m) wide. The acoustics in the ballcourt enable a whisper to be heard 500 feet away, and are unaffected by wind. The secret behind this phenomenon remains unexplained.

The sacred ball game, called *pok-a-tok*, was played in a walled field with a stone ring set 10 feet up the wall at either end, and the object was to keep the ball from touching the ground while moving it across an end line. Players could touch the ball only with their hips, knees, and elbows, and the ball could be bounced off the ground and walls. Play was continuous, with no time-outs or substitutions.

Spectators sat in stone bleachers above the walls and gambled heavily on the outcome of the game. If a player were to score a goal through the stone ring, an uncommon feat, he could demand all the jewelry of the spectators; such goals usually precipitated a mass rush for the exit. The game ended with a religious ceremony -- often involving the decapitation of the losing team.

Tzompantli

The tzompantli is a T-shaped platform decorated with rows of human skulls carved in relief. Similar structures in Aztec cities were used to publicly display the skulls of sacrificial victims.

Castillo

The temple of K'uk'ulkan, El Castillo ("the castle"), is a massive pyramid located in the center of the city. It was constructed so that during each vernal equinox the sun will cast the shadow of a writhing serpent down its steps. When standing at the top of the pyramid, one has a commanding view of the city, and when speaking in a normal voice, can be heard at ground level for some distance. The inside of the pyramid consists of dark, narrow corridors, and claustrophobically small chambers.

Temple of the Warriors

A massive temple surrounded by hundreds of columns carved with reliefs of Toltec officers.

Mercado

"The market place."

Caracol

The Caracol, Spanish for "snail," is a round building with a domed ceiling whose window point toward the equinox sunset, and the southernmost and northernmost point on the horizon where Venus rises. The building is most certainly an observatory; the Maya took lines of sight from its platforms, and door and window jambs to plot the rising and setting positions of the sun, the moon, and above all, Venus.

The Nunnery

This building appears to have been the living quarters of elite citizens. Every square foot of the walls has relief and paintings decorating it. Within the nunnery, the corridors become narrower and narrower, with many intersections and turns before leading to a solid wall of limestone, which creates a dead end.

The Cthulhu Connection

As suggested by Richard L. Tierney in his article "The Cthulhu Mythos in Mesoamerican Religion," there is strong correlation between the Cthulhu mythos and Mesoamerican religion. Evidence of Cthulhu worship in Chichén Itzá can be seen in the carvings of the rain god, Chac, which are depicted with long suckered tentacles, suggestive of Cthulhu. Indeed, many of the stalactites in the sacred Cenote are carved in the likeness of a tentacle, with disc-shaped suckers clearly visible. Although it was believed that Chac dwelled within the depths of the sacred Cenote, it is unlikely that Cthulhu, trapped in sunken R'lyeh, actually inhabits it. The well may serve as an abode for one of the Star-Spawn of Cthulhu, huge octopoid creatures that resemble smaller versions of Cthulhu. One of the Star-Spawn, contacted via the Cenote, could serve as an intermediary between the priests and Cthulhu. Most of the Chac/Cthulhu carvings are found on buildings of old Mayan design. Later Toltec-style buildings bear the image of K'uk'ulkan the feathered serpent, known in the Cthulhu mythos as Yig, the Father of Serpents.

Itzamna is described as a kindly, but remote god and corresponds to the Elder God, Nodens in the Cthulhu Mythos. Nodens is considered to be almost friendly to mankind, and will at times aid those in conflict with the Great Old Ones. He is, however, far-removed from mankind and only rarely appears, which may explain the lack of temples dedicated to Itzamna. Mayan priests may have found it more profitable to worship Cthulhu or Yig, gaining power in exchange for blood sacrifice.

Mayan codices make reference to an unnamed god described as a "fat, greedy earth-lord." This description matches that of Tsathoggua, an obese creature with a furry body and bat-like head. Tsathoggua came from Saturn, but now dwells in subterranean caverns on Earth. He spends most of his time asleep, awakening only to receive blood sacrifice from his human worshipers, whom he rewards with spells. Tsathoggua may dwell on occasion in the sacred Cenote, or remain in N'kai, in which case the Formless Spawn of Tsathoggua would dwell within the Cenote, serving as a conduit between Tsathoggua and the priests. The Formless Spawn are amorphous beings of viscous black slime that can take a variety of shapes, often utilizing tentacular pseudopodia to capture and consume prey.

The backward sloping foreheads of the Maya are a batrachian feature similar to the bulging-eyed "Innsmouth look" and is suggestive of Deep Ones ancestry. Tierney suggested that the practice of strapping boards onto the foreheads of infants may have been a later practice that attempted to emulate the features of these servants of Cthulhu.

Using Chichén Itzá

Historical Campaign

There are a variety of interesting scenarios featuring Chichén Itzá that could be incorporated into an historical campaign. PC's could play early Spanish explorers discovering the city and its inhabitants for the first time, or it could be the setting of a Mayan campaign. What caused the collapse of the Mayan culture and the sudden abandonment of the cities? Why did Chichén Itzá survive? Was it due to natural disaster or something more sinister? Perhaps priests of

Chichén Itzá allied themselves with dark forces.

The tech level of the ancient Maya is something of a mixed bag. They are technically a stone-age society with TL0 in the areas of materials, tools, warfare, and transportation (the Maya never appear to have used the wheel); but are TL 1 in government, writing, and agriculture, and TL 3 in the areas of construction, mathematics, and astronomy. The flint and obsidian spears, and knives, macuils, atl-atls, and cloth cuirasses, used by the Maya, are fully described in GURPS Low Tech. The character, Tízoc, from GURPS Warriors (pg. 76) is representative of a Toltec Jaguar Knight of Postclassic Chichén Itzá.

Modern/Futuristic Campaigns

In late nineteenth or early twentieth century Cliffhangers or Horror campaigns, players can explore the ruins of the lost city unearthing its dark secrets and its treasures.

The setting could also make an excellent *Call of Cthulhu* scenario. Perhaps an archeological team working on the ruins of Chichén Itzá has mysteriously vanished. One or more of the PC's could be colleagues, friends, or students of the archeologist in charge of the dig, and travel to the Yucatán to find out what happened. There they discover the horrifying truths that underly the Mayan mythos, and the awakened evil that dwells within the depths of the Cenote. Keep in mind that the numerous tomes of Mayan lore, such as the codices, could be considered to contain Cthulhu Mythos knowledge. The Dresden Codex is shown as an example:

Title	Language	+ to Knowledge	Spell Mult.	San
<i>Dresden Codex</i>	Mayan Hieroglyphic	+12%	x3	-2d6

Spells:

- Contact Deep Ones
- Contact Spawn of Cthulhu
- Contact Cthulhu
- Contact Yig
- Bind Child of Yig
- Summon Child of Yig
- Grasp of Cthulhu
- Bind Jaguar

Tomes written in Roman characters, such as the *Popol Vuh* and the *Books of Chilam Balam*, might bestow less mythos knowledge and contain fewer spells, as they were written after the conquest when many of the primary sources were destroyed. Of course they don't require the characters to translate Mayan hieroglyphics either. *An Account of Things in the Yucatán*, written by Diego de Landa, might describe the priest's revelations as he gradually learned of the secrets man was not meant to know, and bestow a small amount of mythos knowledge.

Chichén Itzá could also be used in a modern or futuristic campaign, such as *GURPS Cthulhupunk*, or *GURPS Black Ops*. Perhaps the Cthulhu/Chac cult has resurfaced among the Maya in the northern Yucatán. What sinister rituals are being performed in the ruins at night after the gates are closed? To what use could the cult's High Priest put the daily busloads of tourist/sacrifices come to tour the site?

Fantasy Campaigns

The Banestorm of *GURPS Fantasy* might explain the sudden depopulation of the southern Mayan cities. A Mayan city complete with temples and ballcourts could exist, thus far undetected, deep within the Great Forest or Djinn lands of Yrth. Yrth, with its panoply of fantastic creatures and races, would certainly affect the development of Mayan

society. Effigies of basilisks or wyverns might adorn their temples, and such creatures may be venerated as avatars of K'uk'ul'can. How do the Maya react to the various races they encounter? Perhaps Elves are very highly regarded -- as sacrifices, whose blood is especially potent in attaining divine favor. Captured Orcs, unworthy of sacrifice, might be valued as slaves for their strength and endurance.

New Skills

The following new skills are particularly relevant to uncovering the mysteries of the Maya:

Scientific

Epigraphy (Mental/Hard)

Defaults to Cryptanalysis-3

This is the study of inscriptions, particularly ancient inscriptions, and epigraphers attempt to decipher ancient hieroglyphics.

Language

Mayan Hieroglyphic (Mental/Hard)

No Default

The ability to read and write Mayan pictographs. Mayan hieroglyphic writing is unique in pre-Columbian America, and is completely unrelated to any other pictographic script, making it extremely difficult to decipher. It has defied epigraphers for centuries, and only in the late twentieth century have major breakthroughs been made, particularly since the launch of Maya Hieroglyphic Inscription Study in 1968.

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The Debt Collectors

"Oh no, here they come again!"

by Michele Armellini

Who Needs Debt Collectors?

Any money-lending business, from usurers to credit card companies. But any supplier might grant credit to a customer, and find their trust betrayed. Less lofty businesses, such as bookmakers, also grant loans. Then there are the ex-wives waiting for their alimony payments. Historically, private businesses often were appointed for tax collection; this can happen again. But speaking game-wise, GMs can make use of a debt-collecting firm. While many adventure/game world designers suggest stripping the PCs of excess cash, and some mention debts and the local taxman, they seldom elaborate on this. So the collectors are here to fill that gap, and to serve as a tool for the GM. Don't let your players ruin the financial balance of your city!

Adventure Hooks And Other Uses

Kane & Thatcher can also serve as adventure hooks: if a righteous PC witnesses their procedures, he might object and get involved. They could be employers if the party is low-powered but rich in muscle; and note that they tend to consider their one-use thugs as expendable. Or they could be hired by the adventurers (who might not know about their methods). Of course they could also serve as urban private eyes. They are a low-power but troublesome enemy for anyone indebted - they'll show up at the most inconvenient moments, e.g., while the adventurers are carrying out delicate negotiations. They might be intruders, hunting the same person the party desperately needs to talk to. Or competitors: the same conman swindled two companies; one hired the adventurers, the other Kane & Thatcher, but there is only so much money left. They can also provide ethics quandaries (yes, that boy owes \$57.68 to the company store, but does he deserve this treatment?). Finally, Kane & Thatcher are a background element for any "Mean Street" setting. As a Disadvantage for a PC, Kane & Thatcher are an Enemy rated at -10. If the indebted PC has radically changed life (and probably name, too), they will appear rarely (modified value: -5); otherwise, they appear fairly often. Alternatively, the debt could be treated as a -10-point Secret, replaced by Kane & Thatcher as an Enemy of the same value if they find out the PC.

Thanks to a modular character design, these NPCs are ready for use at TL6 or TL8, although they are ideally suited for a Cliffhangers time frame (they can be adapted for TL7 by interpolation, but be aware that many of even their less offensive practices are outlawed in most TL7 Western nations). Their gaming description includes a basic package and a TL package. Just pick what you want!

Services And Fees

Kane & Thatcher's main line of business is collecting debts. They find the debtor, and apply a certain pressure. Their fee is a percentage of the amount owed; this can be as low as 5% for simple cases, but much higher when serious difficulties can be foreseen. After all, for the clients, these would be "bad" (irretrievable) debts, otherwise. Since Kane & Thatcher have to cover all their expenses with their fee, the single factor most likely to increase the percentage is easiness in locating the debtor - if they believe he's left the country for good, they might ask 60% of a big debt, and would decline the appointment for puny sums. As a consequence, Kane is always aware of the stop-loss threshold: if they have already spent a third of their prospect fee, finding no clue whatsoever, they are likely to give up. Since they are quite good at finding someone who's trying to disappear, Kane & Thatcher may also work as private eyes. In this case, they have a very high daily fee (something like \$100 at TL6), all expenses paid by the client.

Kane & Thatcher might be contractors, collecting taxes for the state. They'd get 10% of the amounts. Typically they could cheat both sides, exacting more than was due and giving the state coffers much less than they had taken. If so, they'll be careful.

They could also occasionally work for legal firms, serving legal paperwork to tough or elusive addressees. They won't normally work for bail agencies.

Finding The Debtor

Most jobs come in two parts, says Thatcher: "finding 'em and making 'em budge."

Kane always starts with a general assessment. If the debtor has disappeared and no initial clues seem promising, the firm doesn't accept the appointment. On the other hand, most debtors have a life, a family, maybe a job, or they might lack the resources to make themselves really scarce. Sometimes they are just on the lam for a while, or they have moved, but can still be tracked down.

Kane says debtors have a paper trail and a people trail. Thatcher will follow the people trail, starting at the last known address. He'll interview family members, the landlord (looking for clues like mail forwarding instructions), neighbors and co-workers. He'll beat known hangouts. Since family and friends are unlikely to be helpful, he'll try asking the debtor's enemies. He'll use his Contact (a fence), especially if the debtor is an underworld type. When polite questions aren't enough, Thatcher has three other ways to garner information: bribery, Intimidation and booze. Both him and Kane routinely carry a sizable amount of cash for bribery, which often works with neighbors and officials. Thatcher can resort to (subtle or overt) Intimidation with family members. And he'll offer alcoholic drinks, using his Carousing skill for favorable reactions. If Carousing and Fast-Talk don't work (he hasn't high scores), he can always resort to stronger Intimidation.

If the debtor has remained in his home city, the people trail is usually effective. Thatcher will find a forwarding address, or someone who heard the debtor talking about his plans; family members might be intimidated or deceived. Sometimes the debtor changed neighborhood or city, but his options as to jobs and favored places haven't changed, so Thatcher can find someone who has recently seen him.

If Thatcher has potential sources, but he can't make them talk, he'll call in Kane, who has other useful skills (Diplomacy, Detect Lies, Interrogation). Kane will also shadow persons who could be meeting the debtor.

Otherwise, Kane works on the paper trail. First he'll check public records, telephone directories, newspapers, law court notice boards - this is where he uses his Research skill. Then, he'll use his Contacts, a high-ranking employee in a credit business and the local sheriff or police chief, in order to have access to confidential records. He'll bribe (or forge) his way into non-listed phone numbers, license and vehicle registration records, and wherever he has reason to believe there are traces: the local post office, a credit card company, a trade union or professional association. Kane will also do his best to lay his hands on the books and ledgers if the debtor is a business; he knows quite well how money can be spirited away.

At TL8, much of this work is done on the Net. Everybody seems to be hoarding data on anybody, and Kane uses his Computer Hacking capabilities to access those databases. He'll gather basic information on the debtor, especially crucial data such as his social security number. Then he'll use it to cross-check through all sources. This is where Alternate Identities and Zeroed people can make it tough for the hunter.

Collecting The Debt

Once the debtor is found, Kane & Thatcher "make him budge". They have a standard escalation procedure:

- polite requests
- harassment and pressure

- intimidation
- framing and blackmail

Polite requests usually don't work, so they're just a formality. The next step features annoyingly repeated requests, and these are made in the most inconvenient way for the debtor: in public places, at work (in front of employers or customers), in the middle of the night. Simultaneously, Kane will contact every old and new acquaintance of the debtor, purportedly for more questioning, but actually to disclose his debtor status. The debtor will also feel the pressure of a frequent, overt shadowing, and, if there's reason to believe he might run, Kane & Thatcher will employ additional manpower (the PCs?) for a 24/7 blatant surveillance that is also another form of harassment.

If this doesn't work, it's time for some intimidation, with no witnesses. Thatcher will exploit both his skill and his tendency to lose his temper; he'll threaten and manhandle the debtor, possibly roughing him up a bit, but he'll be careful not to cause any serious harm or visible mark. Since debtors usually have family, friends, sometimes a job or business, all of these will be threatened, too. Kane will do this, in a very clear, but deniable, way: "So this is your son, Tommy? Hi, Tommy, you know, I used to know a boy about your age, but he died under a train".

As a last resort, Kane & Thatcher will use any weak spot for leverage. By now they will probably know any debtor's Secrets. If there isn't ground for blackmail, they might well create it, framing the debtor (this is where Photography comes in handy). For this, they might need external manpower (again, they could hire some adventurers).

If the debtor is really dead broke, they'll have him borrow money from someone else (another way of involving a PC group).

Reducing The Risks

In the past, Kane & Thatcher have collected money from people who were much more powerful than them - as it might be the case with the PCs. They are successful because they cautiously study their mark, control the environment and plan in advance. When faced with a hard case, every meeting is carefully planned. Kane is especially obsessive in controlling the environment; this reduces both the physical and the legal risks. For example they don't threaten anybody in front of witnesses (at TL6), or wherever the threats could be recorded (at TL8). If they really need to shake somebody a little, they will patiently wait until they find the place and time where he's most unprepared, possibly unarmed, and without help or witnesses at hand.

On the other hand, there are cases when they do want witnesses. For example, they might face an armed and potentially dangerous debtor (such as a PC tough; and they'll *know* whether he's armed, with what, what his tactics are). In this case, they won't meet him in private, but they may use a trick they call "self-defense". They meet the mark in a public place, such as a bar, and provoke him. They use a very aggressive language, Thatcher goes into an unarmed combat stance, Kane makes a gesture as if he's drawing a weapon. Chances are the debtor reacts, and actually, he makes the first real attack. Surprise surprise, two of the bystanders are off-duty policemen, who promptly intervene (that's what they're paid for!). The debtor has just publicly worsened his position, and probably Thatcher landed a blow or two while the policemen "tried to stop the brawl". Kane & Thatcher will be generous, they won't push charges . . . if the debtor pays.

Generally speaking, they break the law only when it's reasonably safe to do so, and they exploit it (as well as the local law enforcement) whenever they can. This also means stopping short of real violence. In rare cases, when big money is at stake, they might resort to violent "warnings" (without permanent consequences). If so, however, they won't act personally, but hire well-paid, cut-off thugs who won't know who they are working for (once more, these could be the PCs). Kane & Thatcher always have clean hands. If the PCs get to know them well, they might notice they are city types - no outdoor skills. An outdoorsman debtor could exploit this weakness.

History

Kane is the brains of the firm, Thatcher the brawn. Kane has a police background. In his youth, he served as a beat cop

in Chinatown, where he developed his intolerance for Asians. He studied accounting, and he was promoted and tasked with investigating white-collar crimes, frauds, embezzlements. Given the meager pay, he was understandably jealous of the tycoons he investigated. Seeing an opportunity in debt collecting, he left the police and opened his own firm.

He was soon making good money, but once he bit off more than he could chew, and he made a personal enemy out of one of the Chinese ring leaders. Also, he couldn't do all the work by himself, so he decided he needed some help and some brawn. He wanted somebody with a clean slate, but used to violence: he found Thatcher, a former youth gang member who had been smart enough to avoid arrest. Thatcher was then 21 and he was very dissatisfied with the string of low-pay jobs he had had after leaving the gang. Over time, the two developed trust and friendship, even though up to today Kane is very much the senior partner. They complement each other well and they are aware of this; they have helped each other out of many tight corners, and they are now comfortable.

Premises

Kane & Thatcher operate out of an unassuming downtown office in an office building. They live together in a suburban house, and Thatcher stays at a hotel when he needs privacy. Given Kane's paranoid tendencies, both the office and the house are protected with the best security measures Comfortable wealth can buy at the relevant TL, including alarms. Additionally, they own a Doberman attack dog named Surety; sometimes, they leave it in the office. The office has a spare room with a bunk.

They also have an untraceably rented garage. This is pad-locked and has a small booby-trap too, but no alarms; they use it to store any "sensitive" material (so they don't want the police showing up there). There's no way to link them to this garage; when going there, they wear gloves and make sure nobody is following them. Until now they have been able to keep this safe place as their own little secret.

The Characters

Robert Kane

Age: 32
Appearance: Black curly hair, black eyes, pale skin
Height: 5'8" **Weight:** 145
Total Points: 75
ST 10 [0]; **DX** 10 [0]; **IQ** 13 [30]; **HT** 10 [0]. [Total: 30].
Basic Damage: Thrust: 1d-2, Swing: 1d
Basic Speed: 5.00
Advantages: Ally (Thatcher, on 12 or less) [10]; Contact (Business, skill 15, on 12 or less, somewhat reliable) [4]; Contact (Police, skill 18, on 12 or less, somewhat reliable) [6]; Favor (Patron, local Police, on 9 or less) [3]; Reputation +3 (efficient collector, small group of people) [5]; Sensitive [5]; Wealth (Comfortable) [10]. [Total: 43]
Disadvantages: Curious [-10]; Enemy (Chiang Soo's ring, on 6 or less) [-10]; Intolerance (Asians) [-5]; Jealousy [-10]; Sense of Duty (to client) [-5]. [Total: -40]
Quirks: Hates being called "Bob"; Slightly paranoid and control freak; Fidgets with his tie; Loves jazz music; Considers every debtor a stupid [Total: -5]
Skills: Accounting-13 [4]; Acting-12 [1]; Area Knowledge (region)-13 [1]; Brawling-10 [1]; Detect Lies-12 [2]; Diplomacy-11 [1]; Disguise-12 [1]; Forgery/TL(3/4, 6 or 8)-11 [1]; Interrogation-13 [2]; Law (local)-11 [1]; Research-14 [4]; Shadowing-14 [4]; Streetwise-12 [1]; Tactics-11 [1]. [Total: 25].
Languages: English (native)-13 [0]; Spanish-12 [1]; Japanese-12 [1]. [Total: 2]

TL6 Package [Total: 20]

Skills: Area Knowledge (nation)-13 [1]; Criminology/TL6-13 [2]; Detect Lies-14 [+2]; Driving (car)-10 [2]; Guns (pistol)/TL6-13* [2]; Judo-9 [2]; Knife-10 [1]; Lip Reading-12 [1]; Lockpicking/TL6-12 [1]; Research-16 [+4];

Stealth-10 [2]; [Total: 20].

Weapons: Browning .25ACP, fine small knife

Armor/Clothes: Ordinary clothing, gloves, boots

Equipment: Good-quality lockpicks, small flashlight

Money: \$1,000 **Encumbrance:** none **Move:** 5 **Dodge:** 5 **Parry:** 4 (Knife) 6 (Brawling) 6 (Judo) **Block:** -

Notes: * Includes +2 for IQ13.

TL8 Package [Total: 20]

Skills: Area Knowledge (nation)-13 [1]; Beam Weapons/TL8-13* [2]; Computer Hacking/TL8-12 [4]; Computer Operation/TL8-13 [1]; Electronics Operation (security systems)/TL8-15 [6]; Driving (car)-10 [2]; Guns (taser)/TL8-13* [2]; Research-15 [+2]. [Total: 20].

Weapons: Ranged taser, capsicum spray

Armor/Clothes: Ordinary clothing, gloves, boots

Equipment: Electronic lockpick, assorted drugs, pen flashlight, miniature digital camcorder

Money: \$3,000 in cash, plus credit cards

Encumbrance: none

Move: 5 **Dodge:** 5 **Parry:** 4 (Knife) 6 (Brawling) **Block:** -

Notes: *Includes +2 for IQ13.

Brian Thatcher

Age: 26

Appearance: Brown short hair, light brown eyes, common inexpressive features

Height: 5'10" **Weight:** 160

Total Points: 75

ST 11 [10]; **DX** 12 [20]; **IQ** 11 [10]; **HT** 11 [10]. [Total: 50].

Basic Damage: Thrust: 1d-1, Swing: 1d+1

Basic Speed: 5.75

Advantages: Acute Vision +1 [2]; Ally (Kane, on 12 or less) [10]; Combat Reflexes [15]; Contact (Street, connected, skill 15, on 9 or less, somewhat reliable) [2]; Wealth (Comfortable) [10]. [Total: 39]

Disadvantages: Bad Temper [-10]; Greed [-15]; Phobia (entomophobia, mild) [-10]; Sense of Duty (to client) [-5]. [Total: -40]

Quirks: Dislikes collecting from women; Hates being lectured; Feels naked without a knife; Likes poorly lit bars; Taps his fingers on the table when about to lose his temper [Total: -5]

Skills: Area Knowledge (city)-11 [1]; Brawling-12 [1]; Carousing-11 [2]; Fast-Talk-11 [2]; Intimidation-13 [6]; Shadowing-11 [2]; Streetwise-10 [1]. [Total: 15].

Languages: English (native)-11 [0]; Spanish-10 [1]. [Total: 1]

TL6 Package [Total: 15]

Skills: Area Knowledge (nation)-11 [1]; Driving (car)-12 [2]; Fast-Draw (pistol)-13* [1]; Guns (pistol)/TL6-14** [2]; Holdout-10 [1]; Judo-11 [2]; Knife-12 [1]; Lockpicking/TL6-11 [2]; Photography/TL6-10 [1]; Stealth-12 [2]; [Total: 15].

Weapons: S&W .38Special, fine small knife, brass knuckles

Armor/Clothes: Ordinary clothing, gloves, boots

Equipment: Good-quality lockpicks, small brandy flask, small flashlight

Money: \$500

Encumbrance: none

Move: 5 **Dodge:** 6* **Parry:** 6* (Knife) 9* (Brawling) 7* (Judo) **Block:** -

Notes: * Includes +1 for Combat Reflexes. ** Includes +1 for IQ11.

TL8 Package [Total: 15]

Skills: Area Knowledge (nation)-11 [1]; Computer Operation/TL8-11 [1]; Electronics Operation (security systems)/TL8-12 [4]; Driving (car)-12 [2]; Fast-Draw (needler)-13* [1]; Guns (needler)/TL8-13** [1]; Holdout-10 [1]; Judo-11 [2]; Knife-12 [1]; Stealth-11 [1]; [Total: 15].

Weapons: Needler, small vibroknife, stun grenade

Armor/Clothes: concealable Kevlar vest under retro trenchcoat, trousers, gloves, boots PD0, DR14

Equipment: Good-quality lockpicks, electronic lockpick, assorted drugs, pen flashlight, miniature digital camcorder

Money: \$1,000 in cash, plus credit cards

Encumbrance: none

Move: 5 Dodge: 6* Parry: 6* (Knife) 9* (Brawling) 7* (Judo) Block: -

Notes: * Includes +1 for Combat Reflexes. ** Includes +1 for IQ11.

Pyramid Pick

Ravenloft (for d20)

Written by Andrew Cermak, John W. Mangrum, Andrew Wyatt

Published by [White Wolf](#) (under [Sword and Sorcery Studios](#) and Arthaus)

224 page hardcover; \$29.95

I have to admit that one of the things I haven't been that happy about with Wizards of the Coast and its new edition of *Dungeons & Dragons* is that they don't have plans to publish new 3rd Edition material based in some of their previous settings. While we're sure to get plenty of *Forgotten Realms* material, WotC won't be bringing us any new books for such settings as *Dark Sun*, *Al Quadim*, or *Ravenloft*. Fortunately, White Wolf stepped forward and has been licensed by WotC to publish new material for the latter setting. I don't know about you, but *Ravenloft* was always one of my favorite *AD&D* settings, and I was quite pleased to hear the announcement.

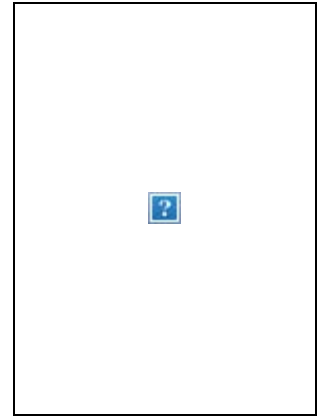
However, White Wolf is a name that brings a certain *something* with it to the table. They're well known for their World of Darkness series of horror games, and they're also well known for the particular type of horror and atmosphere that those settings employ. Now, I don't know about you, but I don't know if that brand of horror matches up exactly to the Gothic mystery of *Ravenloft*. So, while excited, I was also slightly apprehensive about the news.

Well, cracking open the book, I found that this issue was one of the first addressed. No White Wolf does not plan to introduce the introspective brand of horror found in its other games, but they do have a lot of plans for the *Ravenloft* setting. What one finds reading through the book is that they've taken the existing material updated it (for *3E* rules), expanded it, and tweaked it just a bit here and there. Most of the changes are slight, and most of them are quite for the better.

One of the first changes is that this new edition of *Ravenloft* won't place as much emphasis on escape from the realm, and, as they've phrased it, they've "scaled back on the camp." If you played the old edition then you know just what they mean. There was a certain degree of campiness to the game, and in my experience much of that actually extended from the whole emphasis on escape. Each adventure we ran would end with the mists creeping in and the chilling narrator saying, "Will our heroes escape the Domain of Dread? Tune in next time to find out . . ." The formula became almost like a TV show at times, and while the game was loads of fun, yes, it was kind of campy.

So the developers have decided to present the setting more as a true setting, rather than just this big hellish island that the PCs are eternally trying to escape from, and this change in focus is seen in a lot of subtle ways in the book. More is provided on character creation, with more information for fleshing out character backgrounds and making them natives of the domain. This new focus has also spawned a certain degree of focus on cohesion between the domains. *Ravenloft* always had a certain idiosyncrasy in that domains could be different from each other in impossible ways. You'd step from one domain into another, and the seasons, climate, and even constellations would change. While some of these are certainly still present (especially on the different Clusters and Islands of Terror), the developers have made the Core domains a touch more coherent; in other words, it feels more like a real realm, where characters might actually be from, which in turn fits in nicely with the whole "non-escape/PCs native to the domain" thing.

The book starts off with a decent intro that will certainly be helpful to those new to the game, and it then goes into a brief history of the realm. The history could be a bit more in depth, but it does its job well. The calendar has been



advanced just slightly, but not much. Again, the focus is on tweaking things, not changing them. So the developers didn't go rewriting the background or advancing the time table way ahead so that they could completely warp everything.

But there have been a few changes . . . er updates, I guess we'll call them. Most of the domains seem to have been left alone, but it's possible that we'll find new changes as more books come out. Everyone's favorite bad guys, Lord Soth and Vecna, are no longer present. Personally, I'm sad to see Soth go, as he fit in so well here, but I'm rather glad Vecna is gone (I, among others, didn't feel that he really belonged). Also, the lich Azalin has returned to his realm after several years of absence (which is a big deal to those who had been following the storyline there).

Character races are basically the same as before. Humans are dominant, with dwarves, elves, and half-elves being rare and generally disliked in most realms. A new race called the caliban has been added, although this is just an interpretation of half-orcs. Basically, there are no orcs in *Ravenloft*, so to account for folks who want to play a half-orc as per the *Player's Handbook*, the authors have made up a race of what amount to rare mutants. Also available again as a playable race are half-Vistani, who are much like humans but with a few twists.

Classes aren't changed a whole lot. All classes are present again (in the last edition, I believe, they left a few out), although some are rare. The rules changes are basically just those to make them fit into the whole *Ravenloft* milieu. For example, clerics' turning undead is altered, as is the paladin's detect evil ability. One thing that is bound to get some complaints in this day and age is that this book introduces no prestige classes. Personally, I don't care, as none seemed immediately necessary, but they are quite popular for some *d20* fans, and I'm sure they'll be speaking up. A few skills are revisited and one (Hypnosis) is added. New feats are present, and these might cause some problems with some groups. Some, like Back to the Wall, are balanced just fine and dandy, but others like Ghostsight are a bit heavy handed. It's nothing that will break the game (there aren't that many), but DMs should read them over carefully before approving them. To be fair, though, all of the new feats are high on the "kewl factor" and will add a dynamic element to the game.

The section on faiths was a nice surprise. The faiths found in previous editions of *Ravenloft* were just kind of covered as they came up. They weren't presented in one concise place, allowing players to truly make use of them. Again, this goes back to the objective of making it easier to play a character native to the domain, and having these faiths outlined (even if the descriptions are brief) is important. A new spell domain, Mist, is also added, which has some effects particular to *Ravenloft*.

Game mechanics are addressed as well, naturally, and most of the stuff we find is old stuff updated for *d20*. The fear, horror, and madness saves, as well as curse checks, are all translated well and provide more detail than in some of the older editions of the game. Powers checks are here, of course, but some may be disappointed that the expanded thirteen step system is cut back down to six. I always found six steps to be enough, but a lot of gamers liked the expanded system of the previous edition. Anyone who knows *Ravenloft* knows that a lot of magic functions differently, and this material has been updated here again. There are no big surprises, and some gamers will be upset that no new spells are provided.

The realm descriptions are the meat of the book, and they are excellent. The authors have really stuck to their objective of presenting *Ravenloft* as a real world where thousands of people live their entire lives . . . not just some cosmic prison for super nasty bad guys that hapless adventurers get stuck in sometimes. The realm descriptions are in an incredible amount of detail and work a great deal to show the ecology and society of each realm. A lot of little things that seemed idiosyncratic before because they lacked explanation are smoothed over. The book also covers all of the realms, whereas the previous edition left a few out for lack of space. The only real nitpick one can find here is that sometimes the text can drone on a little bit about the mundane aspects, which lets some of the Gothic flavor slip here and there . . . not that it's ever so bad as to completely kill it.

The final portion gives us a glimpse at some of the major creature types, which have long been expanded in the *Ravenloft* setting (namely, through the *Van Richten's Guide* series). The updates to *d20* rules are really quite smooth, although I have to ask if it was necessary to include this material here. There are no monsters in this book, so why bother updating vampires, liches, lycanthropes, and what not if that's all we get? I can't say, but at least they did a

good job of it. The book is then rounded out by a somewhat half-hearted discussion of Gothic horror techniques (good points, but not much development on them).

The artwork is all pretty good, but I'd have to say that I don't think it's quite as good as that in previous editions of the game. I'd always felt that *Ravenloft* got some of the best art treatment out there -- not only good art, but art that truly did bring out the mood of the game -- and I just can't quite get into the artwork of this edition. This is always a personal thing, so some folks are bound to love it; the only complaint I really can make is that I wish there was a little more of it. On the plus side, however, the book does have a good set of maps, which are *in* the book. I loved the poster maps of the old boxed sets, but I really hated having to bust them out when just flipping through because a map was not present inside the book.

This book does have one major bugaboo that I must bring up though, as it will definitely be a hot point among DMs. No domain lords. This is a really touchy subject. On the one hand it's nice to see them leave the domain lords out in order to devote more space to making it a player-friendly realm, but on the other hand if you're a DM you're gonna have to buy more books. While everyone will have their own opinion on this, there is one important point that I think bears mentioning. One of the overall best things about this new book is that it is truly player friendly. Players can read through most of this book and not learn too many secrets that they aren't supposed to know. Thus this book becomes more of a player's manual than just a core setting book. This is good because it ties back into that whole objective of making this a more cohesive realm where PCs will actually originate from (as opposed to simply a guide for visiting outlanders).

We can see the value in that, but there is something important about it. *Ravenloft* is a domain where it is of paramount importance that the players don't know everything. It's a realm of mystery and horror. If the players know all the secrets to every realm they go to (because they read it in the main book), then it really steals some of the game's magic. Astute readers will not only note that the domain lords aren't described, but any time they are even mentioned, it's from the perspective that PCs from the realms would see them as. Some like Strahd and Azalin are very active in there domains, and the public knows a bit about them, but others are a complete mystery. What's told about them is what the PCs are likely to know in-game, which keeps the DM on the big end of the stick as far as challenging his players goes with these mysterious powers that be. So, while some may think that the dark lords were left out to save space, this reviewer thinks they were left out deliberately to preserve the feeling of this book as a player's guide and to hold back that mystery.

That said, it is still frustrating as a DM to have to cross reference books when looking up domains. Having the dark lord info right there in each domain is handy and saves time. All I can say is that I hope they make the book(s) detailing the dark lords worth the extra money and extra effort to read . . . although if this book is any indication, I'd say it will be.

All in all, this really is an excellent reincarnation of the classic *D&D* setting of Gothic horror. The authors have remained true to the setting, and what changes they are making seem to be for the better. While there are issues that some will complain about, in the long run I think most of these will be smoothed out. If you are a player or DM returning to *Ravenloft*, then this edition should prove itself worthy. And if you're new to the game, then you're in for a pleasant . . . er, maybe I should say pleasantly horrifying . . . ride.

--Jon Thompson

Pyramid Review

eBay: The Card Game

Published by [Journeyman Press](#)

Written by Marcus D'Amelio

Illustrated by Aaron Williams

\$19.95

Games that imitate or are based on websites are nothing new. Already in 2001, 9th Level Games and ethereal FORGE have given us the *Ninja Burger The Role-Playing Game*, based upon the [NinjaBurger website](#). But for what is their swan song, Journeyman Press have based their last game on eBay, the well known, if not to say, infamous on-line auction site (or as it likes to style itself, The world's Online Marketplace). *eBay: The Card Game* comes in a sturdy, deep oblong box. Inside there are three decks of cards and five ordinary six-sided dice, all of which are securely held in a plastic insert that doubles as the game's card tray. In addition there is a single Start player card and a rules sheet. The three decks consist of sixty Curio cards, one hundred Bidding cards and seventy-five Item cards.

All of the components are high quality, and fans of the Nodwick comic, will be pleased that Aaron Williams has illustrated all of the cards. Whilst there is little difference in the illustrations for the Curio and Bidding cards, each Item card is individually drawn and named, and is accompanied by a descriptive quote. Favourites include:

- "Monkey Phone Call" -- If you win this auction I will call you and screech in the phone. Average length 2 to 3 minutes.
- "Plastic Blundercats Lunchbox" -- Blunder Blunder Blundercats ho! Now relive that not so great cartoon from your childhood with this great schnarfy lunchbox.
- "WhY Weanie Babies - Rare Marsupial Marv" -- Get this rarest of the rare Weanie Baby! Marsupial Marv was only on sale between the hours of 4 and 8 P.M. on October 7th, 1998. One of only 203 and a half in existence.

It is fair to say that these cards will amuse, rather than make you laugh out loud.

Designed as a game for three to six players, the winner is the first player to match all their Curio cards with Item cards they have won through the bidding process. A game should last no longer than an hour, with the number of Curio and Item cards that need to be matched dependent upon the total number of players. If there are three or four players, then it is five Curio and Item cards, if five or six players, it is only four.

Both the Curio and Item cards are divided into six categories: collectible, electronics, etc, games sports, and vintage. Some Items can also fall in to more than one category, but only one Item card can be matched per Curio card. Each Item card is also marked with a number of rounds that it is available for auction. The dice are actually used to count down the number of rounds left an Item has.

Bidding cards come in two types. The first is money in denominations of \$100, \$200, \$300, \$400, \$500, and \$1000. The second are Action cards, which alter the normal sequence of the game to the advantage of the player using it.

The game is set up with the players receiving their Curio cards -- which they keep hidden until the end of the game -- and several Item cards are placed into play, face up in the center of the table and arranged into a row. If there are three or four players, then it should be four Items, or five Items if just five or six players. A single die is placed on each Item indicating the number of remaining rounds. Each player draws five bidding cards and a die is rolled to determine who



goes first and that player is given the Starter card before play begins.

The game is conducted in rounds during which every player takes a turn and ends with the auction update phase. During a turn, a player can refresh their hand of bidding cards up to five; if they have an unwanted Item card, they can discard it in return for drawing another three bidding cards; and either play an Action card and place an actual bid on an Item; or discard as many Bidding cards as they like.

To place a bid on an Item, the player places their money card face down beside its Item card. Players need to remember to place their bids on the same side around an Item card, but perhaps marking them with different coloured beads or counters could be used to make this easier to remember. Once everyone has taken a turn, the Starter card is passed to the next player on the left, and all dice on the Item cards are lowered by one. Should a die reach zero, then all bids are turned over and revealed. Action cards can be played at this point by all players and in any number. Once the effects of these cards have been resolved, whoever has bid the most money on an Item then wins it. Items without bids are discarded, while tied bids are allowed to remain in play for a further turn to resolve the auction. The players hold won Items in secret until they can reveal that they have matched them with all of their Curio cards at the game's end. Meanwhile new Item cards are put up for bid and a new round begins.

Action cards come in ten types, six of which can be played during a player's turn and the other four during the auction update phase. A few Action cards are played for game effect, but most model the process and events of real world bidding on eBay. A sample of the former is "Know Your Enemy" which allows a player to examine another player's hand of Bidding cards and then randomly discard one; "Lost Connection" is an example of the latter and blocks all bids upon an Item for the remainder of the round. The cards played during the auction update phase mainly affect the final price of Items allowing a last minute bid, or increasing the price paid through expensive shipping. There is of course the dreaded "Bad Feedback" card, which forces a player to lose an Item that they have won, providing the second highest bidder to purchase it instead.

eBay: The Card Game is an attractive and easy to play game. It should appeal to a wider audience than Journeyman Press's last game, *Zombies!!!*, as the subject matter, and indeed the components are more accessible to a wider audience. Plus your grandmother won't find the subject matter and components quite so gruesome as in *Zombies!!!*. Indeed, this is a decent family game that should appeal also to anyone who has bid for anything online. The cards should at least amuse players, and both the cards and the rules are simple enough to allow some tinkering by the dedicated gamer. Even if this possibility is ignored, players will no doubt want to add their own Item cards.

eBay: The Card Game really does model the world of online auctions . . . now all we need to see is the game turn up on eBay itself, for the circle to be complete.

--Matthew Pook

Dork Tower!



Dork Tower!



The Computer Is Your Friend

Back in Ye Olde Days (circa 1984), *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* character sheets were printed on a garish yellow-orange paper. This was to prevent photocopying; when copied, the sheets became a nigh-unreadable dark graphic sludge.

I should point out that I was unaware of this for quite some time, since the only character sheets I had ever seen up to that point -- given to me by my Civics teacher -- were, in fact, a nigh-unreadable dark graphic sludge. Clearly, she had access to the school's copy machine.

Fast forward ten years. I was planning a *Star Trek* adventure where I had the heroes go back in time to the 1970s (figuring that the original show had gone to the 60s, and *Star Trek IV* went to the 1980s, but this historic -- and funky -- era of the in-between decade was unexplored).

Part of my adventure was based on the heroes interacting with the Space Shuttle *Enterprise*. (In my timeline, that vessel helped inspire the original *1701*, rather than a massive Trekkers letter-writing campaign.) So I needed to do some research on the 1977 *Enterprise*.

(As an aside, I also had the heroes interact with rabid *Star Wars* fans. "What's that?" said a costumed Jedi wannabe, fiddling with a phaser. "Some kinda lightsaber prop?")

Anyway, I trekked (har!) to the library; being a university student living on campus at the time, it wasn't too far. I was fairly conversant with the library's computer system, so I was able to find the information I needed in only about four hours.

On a whim, as I started to write this column, I did a search at Altavista.com for the same information.

It took three minutes.

Mostly because my Internet connection was slowed from downloading other stuff at the time.

Anyway, the point is, I can barely begin to list everything that technology has made easier -- even possible -- with regard to gaming. Here are some that spring to mind:

Communication. Although sending an email isn't inherently much faster than calling up a fellow gamer when it comes to planning a Saturday session, advances in communication *do* have a number of other advantages. I can jot an email planning a game at three in the morning . . . something I would be ill-advised to try by phone.

You can also get the word out to all players very quickly; I can send the same email to everyone, ensuring that everyone is on the same page. Or I can send blue book sessions to my GM in an easy, convenient way, for him to delete at will.

Perhaps more usefully, the Web allows the possibility of mass archival communication. Campaign notes, back story, adventure summaries, background information, and timeline and history details can all be put online, allowing everyone to access that information (including new players, those who might be interested in joining your campaign, people who accidentally click on your website, and the like).

And many campaigns *only* exist in a "virtual" sense, either in playing by email, or online like in *Pyramid's* [chat room](#).

Presentation: It's amazing *how* much better games can appear at all levels, thanks to the wonders of technology.

The staples of our games have improved exponentially, like character sheets that have gone from mimeographed smudgy ugly cobbled together to attractive color ink jets or black & white personal laser printed copies. (Does anyone else remember the tiny ads in the back of *Dragon* for allegedly professional printed character sheets . . . that looked

like they rolled off a dot matrix?)

Or music. Today we have more music possibilities than ever before (for example, I'm always amazed at some of the obscure soundtracks that have made it onto CD). But more interesting (to me, at any rate) is the *forms* of audio presentation we have available. In that same Star Trek campaign it was a big deal that the *Star Trek: Generations* soundtrack had just come out, since I was able to use its bridge sequence sound effect track (basically, three minutes of the *Enterprise-B* bridge background noise) on repeat for ambiance. But what's available now, just seven years later, puts that to shame. We can store a thousand songs in MP3 format on a portable player, playable in any order we want. We can burn our own "mix" CDs. (A friend of mine creates a CD compilation for each new campaign world he starts.) We can have sound effects on cue. I remember spending one afternoon using voice synthesis software on my Apple IIgs to create a creepy "clue" tape for the players. Now I could do the same thing in half an hour . . . and I might need to be careful to keep the synthesized voice from sounding *too* good.

I've made good-looking full-color props for players, printed on a color printer that currently retails for under \$50. With a laminator (either personal or at a local copy shop), I can make laminated ID cards for FBI agents, superheroes, or any other "official" types. Cheap scanners and good photo software make it possible to fabricate or duplicate handouts with ease. Fonts and computer effects can help would-be editors duplicate -- or fabricate -- almost any effect they can think of. (I still remember the glee of my first printer, which was able to print its blocky dotted text in *italics!* Oooohhh . . .)

In all, GMs (and players) can make more effective and engrossing handouts than ever before . . . without much more effort than it would have taken to go to a copy shop in the old days.

Information: We may well be living in the Information Age; as my earlier library example showed, the amount of information that's out there for the taking is staggering. (Heck, after rebates I get a new encyclopedia from Microsoft every year . . . for *free!*) We can run more factually based adventures than was ever possible, again with minimal effort. (I remember doing research on relativity time dilation for one *Fading Suns* game I ran. Not only was I able to find the theories -- perfect for engineer technobabble -- but I also found a page that *explained* those theories, meaning I could actually use the information.)

And even if you can't find a webpage for information (or with advice for a campaign trouble spot), the possibility exists for asking a newsgroup. I can't tell how many times I've gleaned information from the combined infinite wisdom of the Teeming Millions that I never would have guessed before. And the number of folks who write telling me the \$15 a year for *Pyramid* is worth that just for the discussion boards means I'm not alone.

And this is all referring to "real" world information; the game books and aids that are out there now amaze me, at times. If you would have told me in 1994 that I would someday be able to store 250 issues of *Dragon Magazine* on a hard disk, or search through millions of words of *Pyramid Magazine*, I'm not sure if I would have believed it. And I can't tell you how much I would have loved the *GURPS Character Generator* back when I was spending hours making *GURPS* characters . . .

Um . . . Miscellanetion. And that's not counting the jillion other minor conveniences that have improved life and gaming. How *did* our gaming forefathers survive without microwaves and microwave popcorn?

Anyway, the point is, given how few years the roleplaying game hobby has been around (I mean, we're not exactly philately here), I'm amazed at the amount that technology and innovation has made it possible to enhance and expand the hobby. This is a point I'll get back to (probably in two weeks . . . next week is almost certainly going to be holiday related, knowing me), but for the time being, just keep in mind how much we can use technology to make the games we love better . . . if not quite as recognizable as nigh-unreadable dark graphic sludge.

* * *

Unfortunately, our own Ken Hite is currently suffering from The Crud, and is unable to breathe right . . . let alone write. He should be back next week for his seasonal Shakespeare column. (After that, he'll be skipping the next week so he can spend time in Maine, where he currently plans to %#@%5@#^4[][_+... for the new year.)

--*Steven Marsh*

* * *

*Last week's answer: Miskatonic University Antarctic Expedition Pack (for **Beyond the Mountains of Madness**)*

(Three stars) "Just how many 'New Years' are there in a single year? What day was J.R. 'Bob' Dobbs born?"

Designer's Notes: GURPS Deadlands Conversion Rules

by Michael Suileabhain-Wilson

Initially, I intended to devote this article to a detailed account of how the *GURPS Deadlands* conversion rules came to be. In the process, however, I learned many things, not least among them that the decisions that make up a short and essentially mechanical piece have mostly to do with boring bits of statistics (I also learned that the wise author waits to have the book in his hands before writing the Designer's Notes, but that's another story). In other words, the rough draft was mortally tedious.

Upon reflection, I thought it would be more fun for all of us to write something to make the book more useful or easier to use. There were no outtakes per se from the development process, but space limitations meant that the conversion rules have only two sample characters: a cowpoke and a huckster. The rules for converting the other special character types -- the Harrowed, the blessed, mad scientists, and shamans -- leave a lot of discretion to the GM and the player, and are in some cases a bit complicated. Examples seem in order.

Therefore, a worked example for each character type follows, with *GURPS* and original *Deadlands* stats. They can also work as allies or antagonists for any *Deadlands* campaign.

SENATOR RALPH STONEMAN

Deadlands Version

Traits and Aptitudes

Deftness 4d4

Nimbleness 2d6

Quickness 1d6

Strength 2d4

Vigor 3d8

Cognition 3d6

Scrutinize 3d6

Knowledge 1d8

Professional: Politics 4d8

Mien 3d12

Leadership 1d12

Overawe 2d12

Persuasion 3d12

Tale-Tellin' 4d12

Smarts 2d12

Bluff 3d12

Ridicule 2d12

Spirit 3d10

Guts 3d10

Wind 18

Edges:

Brave 2

Keen 3

Sand 2

Voice: threatening 1

The Stare 1

Hindrances:

Lame: crippled 5

Stubborn 2

Obligation: Union Congress 1

Obligation: daughter 1

Harrowed Powers:

Arcane Protection

Cat Eyes 2

Dark Vision

Evil Eye

***GURPS* Version**

Total Points: 383

ST 9 [-10]; **DX** 10 [0]; **IQ** 12 [20]; **HT** 13 [30].

Advantages: Alertness +3 [15]; Charisma +2 [10]; Fearlessness +5 [10]; Harrowed [206]; Strong Will +4 [16]; Voice [15].

Disadvantages: Duty (Lillian Stoneman, 15 or less) [-15]; Duty (Union Congress, 12 or less) [-10]; Lame [-25]; Stubbornness [-5].

Skills: Bard-14 [6]; Detect Lies-13 [6]; Fast-Talk-15 [6]; Leadership-11 [1]; Intimidation-15 [8]; Politics-14 [6].

Languages: English-12 [0]

Harrowed Powers: Awareness [15]; Infravision [15]; Knack (3-point Curse) [4]; Magic Resistance 6 [12]; Telescopic Vision 2 [6].

Before the Civil War, Ralph Stoneman was a minor Republican Congressman known mainly for uncompromising integrity and a hot temper, both of which were often inconvenient to the leaders of his party. With the coming of war, however, Stoneman became the foremost Union hawk, soon ascending to the Senate as a major architect of Union war policy. During the Battle of Washington, Senator Stoneman refused to leave the capital. On the second day of fighting, he was struck by a cannonball which robbed him of a leg and of his life. Three days later, Stoneman clawed his way out of a mass grave, changed his clothes, and returned to his office.

Unfortunately for the Union, Stoneman's body is host to a particularly smart manitou. When Stoneman loses Dominion, the manitou doesn't take him on a killing spree. Instead, it introduces legislation: appropriations for mad science, raids against Confederate food supplies, funding cuts for the Pinkertons--any law which might serve the Reckoning. When Dominion returns to Stoneman, he tries to contain the harm he's done; however, to avoid revealing his secret, he has to maintain some sort of consistency.

Besides, the manitou's bills are only a small, if evil, bit beyond what he might have proposed while alive. In the end, Stoneman finds himself advancing the Reckoners' ends whether he has Dominion or not. And as time passes, that bothers him progressively less.

Stoneman's only surviving family is his daughter, Lillian. He is devoted to her; Lillian's well-being is one of the few things which can still evoke the man of principle that Stoneman was in life.

FATHER WILLIAM LEAHY

***Deadlands* Version**

Traits and Aptitudes

Deftness 1d4

Nimbleness 1d6

Quickness 4d6

Strength 1d8

Vigor 4d6

Cognition 2d6

Scrutinize 4

Search 1

Knowledge 4d10

Academia: occult 3

Languages: Latin 2

Languages: Spanish 1

Professional: Theology 3

Mien 3d10

Persuasion 1

Smarts 1d12

Bluff 3

Streetwise 1

Spirit 3d12

Faith 5

Guts 4

Wind 18

Edges:

Arcane background: blessed 3

Gift of Gab 1

Nerves O' Steel 1

Purty 1

Sand 1

Tough As Nails 2

Hindrances:

Cautious 3

Heroic 3

Squeamish 3

Special Abilities:

Miracles: Exorcism, inspiration, lay on hands, protection, sacrifice, sanctify.

***GURPS* Version**

Total Points: 213

ST 10 [0]; **DX** 10 [0]; **IQ** 12 [20]; **HT** 13 [30].

Advantages: Charisma +2 [10]; Combat Reflexes [15]; Divine Favor (+2 to reaction rolls) [35]; Fearlessness +5 [10]; Handsome [15]; Language Talent 2 [4]; Strong Will +9 [36]; True Faith [15]; Very Fit [15].

Disadvantages: Careful [-1]; Charitable [-15]; Discipline of Faith (Catholic priesthood) [-10]; Mild Phobia (Squeamishness) [-10].

Skills: Detect Lies-14 [8]; Exorcism-12 [4]; Fast-Talk-14 [4]; Occultism-13 [4]; Professional Skill (Sanctify)-12 [4]; Streetwise-11 [1]; Theology-18 [16].

Languages: English-12 [0]; Latin-12 [2]; Spanish-11 [1]

Father William Leahy was once one of the rising stars of the Boston archdiocese, a brilliant theologian and dedicated worker among the afflicted. However, his vocation was troubled by a persistent feeling that he was somehow not doing the work he was placed on this earth to do. One day, an issue of the Tombstone Epitaph came into his hands. He couldn't bring himself to credit most of its stories, but he felt that the newspaper described a land sorely in need of

spiritual balm. He quickly secured permission to travel West and tend to the flock of the frontier.

The West hasn't been quite what he expected. He's discovered that the Western wilderness is populated by strange creatures, and the Western towns by stranger people. He's discovered that while the spirit is willing, the flesh (and the stomach) is often weak. And he's discovered that while faith in the Almighty is a potent thing, it isn't an iota more powerful than the fight against evil requires.

Father William may be found in towns and villages across the Weird West. He rarely stays in one place long; the vague sense of purpose which brought him out of Boston continues to propel him from place to place. He is always willing to join in the fight against the Reckoning.

DR. MATTHIAS KEDGER, PURVEYOR OF SOVEREIGN ELIXIRS AND OMNIVALENT REMEDIES

***Deadlands* Version**

Traits and Aptitudes

Deftness 3d8

Nimbleness 2d8

Quickness 3d4

Strength 1d6

Vigor 1d8

Cognition 2d6

Scrutinize 1

Knowledge 4d12

Demolition 1

Language: German 2

Mad Science 5

Medicine: general 3

Science: biology 2

Science: chemistry 3

Mien 4d8

Persuasion 2

Tale-Tellin' 4

Smarts 3d10

Bluff 1

Scroungin' 3

Streetwise 1

Spirit 2d4

Wind 12

Edges:

Arcane background: mad scientist 3

Dinero 1

Hindrances:

Big 'Un 1

Greedy 2

Ugly As Sin 1

***GURPS* Version**

Total Points: 132

ST 9 [-10]; **DX** 12 [20]; **IQ** 13 [30]; **HT** 10 [0].

Advantages: Charisma +2 [10]; Comfortable [10]; Gadgeteer (Quick) [50].

Disadvantages: Greed [-15]; Overweight [-5]; Ugly [-10]; Weak Will -4 [-32].

Skills: Bard-15 [6]; Biochemistry-13 [8]; Botany-13 [4]; Chemistry-14 [6]; Demolition-12 [1]; Detect Lies-12 [2]; Ecology-13 [4]; Fast-Talk-14 [2]; Genetics-13 [8]; Physician-14 [6]; Physiology-13 [8]; Scrounging-14 [2]; Streetwise-12 [1]; Weird Science-16 [20]; Zoology-13 [4].

Languages: English-13 [0]; German-13[2].

Matthias Kedger was an indifferent student until one day, whiling away an interminable chemistry lecture with mental solitaire, he was struck with the revelation of a hangover remedy which would change the lives of his fellow students forever. The experiments which followed demolished a dormitory and adjoining city block, but Kedger's Peerless Temperance Decoction was a success. Several years of study in Germany followed, where his professors told him his theories were dangerous, unsubstantiated, and indeed, outright insane.*

Upon Dr. Kedger's return to his native soil, he attempted to make his fortune selling various innovative medicines and cosmetics to New England high society. However, a series of regrettable incidents led him to recognize the advantages of the itinerant life. Dr. Kedger's Travelling Medicine Show was born.

Today, Dr. Kedger and his assistants move from town to town, concocting and selling the wondrous products of Dr. Kedger's fevered mind. As such, player characters could encounter Dr. Kedger virtually anywhere, and the Medicine Show can provide an endless supply of new toys for the party.

GURPS Steam-Tech has a number of appropriate medicines; alchemical elixirs from *Magic* or advanced drugs from *Ultra-Tech* might also work. The Medicine Show could also serve as a refuge for PCs in trouble; if they can persuade someone in the Show to help them out, a group of PCs could easily conceal themselves among the Show's paraphernalia until leaving town. Or a campaign could focus on the Medicine Show itself, with the PCs as Dr. Kedger's assistants and hangers-on; the Show works fairly close to the supernatural in its daily operations, and its traveling nature makes it an excellent adventuring venue.

* The events of the 1860's and 1870's have led many modern universities to appoint an assistant dean in charge of telling unruly scholars that they are mad, I tell you, mad. In more traditional institutions this function is usually delegated to a junior faculty member, like most unpleasant administrative work.

SEVEN CLOUDS FALL

Deadlands Version

Traits and Aptitudes

Deftness 2d8

Shootin' 1

Nimbleness 4d6

Climbin' 2

Horse Ridin' 3

Quickness 1d4

Strength 1d6

Vigor 4d6

Cognition 3d12

Arts: painting 5

Search 3

Knowledge 2d12

Academia: occult 3
Area Knowledge: Great Maze 4
Language: English 3

Mien 3d4

Leadership 1

Smarts 3d10

Spirit 1d12

Faith 3
Guts 3

Wind 18

Edges:

Arcane Background: shaman 3
Level-Headed 5
Luck O' The Irish 5
Keen 3
Nerves O' Steel 1
Veteran O' The Weird West 0

Hindrances:

Big 'Un -2
Bloodthirsty -2
Oath -3: repair the rock paintings
Stubborn -2

Special Abilities:

Ritual 7: paint, pledge
Favors: curse, earth speak, medicine, pact, sacred ground, spirit warrior, vision quest

GURPS Version

Total Points: 336 1/2

ST 9 [-10]; **DX** 11 [10]; **IQ** 14 [45]; **HT** 13 [30].

Advantages: Alertness +4 [20]; Combat Reflexes [15]; Fearlessness +4[8]; Initiation 3 [30]; Luck [15]; Spirit Advisor: Bear(all the time) [10]; Strong Will +1 [4]; Unusual Background (veteran of the Weird West) [10].

Disadvantages: Bloodlust [-10]; Fat [-10]; Reduced Move 1 [-5]; Stubbornness [-5]; Vow (repair the rock paintings) [-15]; Vow (aid the wounded) [-10].

Skills: Area Knowledge (Great Maze)-16 [4]; Artist-17 [10]; Climbing-11 [2]; Guns-12 [1/2]; Leadership-13 [2]; Occultism-15 [4]; Riding(horse)-12 [4]; Ritual Magic-20 [32]; Theology-13 [2].

Languages: English-15 [4]; Chumash-14 [0]. Ritual Paths: Path of Health-20 [31]; Path of Luck-19 [27]; Path of Protection-18 [23]; Path of the Spirit-18 [23].

Rituals: Curse-18 [6]; Earth Speak-18 [6]; Medicine-18 [6]; Pact-18 [6]; Sanctuary-18 [8]; Spirit Warriort-18 [8]; Vision Quest-18 [6].

Most residents of the Great Maze know Seven Clouds Fall as a knowledgeable and amiable Indian guide to most of the major points of interest throughout the Maze. Fewer know her as an artist of considerable skill. Very few know her to be a powerful shaman on a mission.

Seven Clouds Fall planned to spend her life as a craftsman. One day, however, the spirits struck her with a terrible vision. They showed her that the devastation and anarchy of the Great Maze was the best fate that mankind could expect when the earth spirits turned from them. Across the continent, other shamans were bent on maintaining the Old Ways, to prevent the earth spirits of other regions from breaking with humanity. But the chaos resulting from the rage of the spirits of California was spreading across the land, and if mankind was to be saved, California's earth spirits would have to be appeased. Seven Clouds Fall would have to restore the sacred rock paintings Raven desecrated.

This was no mean task. To restore the sacred rock paintings, she would have to locate them, get access to them, interpret their meaning, and ritually restore the paintings. Seven Clouds Fall has often despaired of ever getting it done.

Still, a sacred mission is a sacred mission. Over the years, she has gathered a loose network of helpers. Working as a guide permits her to travel with relative impunity through the Maze and keep an ear to the ground. At any moment, she is gathering leads on a handful of paintings, trying to nail down the location of a few others, figuring out how to safely approach still others, and contemplating the proper ritual to repaint the next painting slated for restoration.

Player characters would be most likely to meet Seven Clouds Fall in her capacity as a guide, or possibly as an artist. She might become an unexpected and powerful ally to a group pursuing the right goal, but she would prove a fickle ally at best. Her interest in the Reckoning outside of its effect on the rock paintings of California is cursory at best; anything which might obstruct her project is an enemy, no matter how commendable that obstruction might otherwise be.

Thanks and Apologies

Dime Novel 1 went to the printer earlier than I expected, and as a result I wasn't able to get the list of playtesters to SJGames in time. Therefore, I'd like to use this opportunity to thank Frederick Brackin, Kenneth Peters, Brett Sanger, Kevin Taylor, and all the folks who contributed to the Conversion Rules playtest. I'd also like to thank Stephen Dedman and Andrew Hackard for answering my many, many questions throughout the writing process.

Demon Seeds

A Pocket Full of Horror for *In Nomine*

by Elizabeth McCoy

It is well known that demonlings in Hell frequently "just appear." No one is entirely sure how it happens, but a couple of Forces stick together, and then something coalesces and a 2-Force demonling appears. Eventually, if something else doesn't eat them first, they gain a third Force and differentiate into gremlins or imps.

Until then, however, most are near-mindless creatures -- some vicious, some cowardly, some with a low cunning, but basically useless for Princely purposes. Therefore, it should be no surprise that it was the Prince of Technology, Vapula, who devised a way to make use of this otherwise superfluous experiment-fodder.

Unfortunately, unlike many other experiments of Technology, this one works almost perfectly.

First, you catch one of the stray demonlings running around the lab. Then, you put it into a relic akin to a Memory Pearl (*Liber Reliquarum*, p. 65), about an inch in diameter. Finally, you have the Demon Seed implanted into a human's body. (Interestingly, the human host need not be a mortal -- Saints and undead are both vulnerable!)

For the mechanics-minded, roll a Contest of Will every day thereafter; if the demonling stuck in the Demon Seed fails, nothing happens. If the human loses, however, the demonling is granted a characteristic point -- and the human loses the equivalent point! This will not result in Force loss until the Demon Seed has stolen 4 characteristic points; the demonling therein then gains the stolen Force. (Fortunately for the human, he still retains the potential for a replacement Force; this is one of the few ways to Force-strip a human which does not destroy that potential.) The characteristic is chosen randomly, and must be possessed by the target human (so zombis cannot provide Will or Perception).

For the non-mechanics minded, drain a Force every 6-12 months that the Demon Seed is within a human's body.

If left in long enough, the Seed *can* strip enough Forces from a human to kill him! The demonling -- or fledged demon! -- within will still be bound within the Seed, and must be rescued from the corpse.

A Kyriotate or Shedite possessing the human *will* have a sense of a "second presence," but will not automatically know what is going on unless it has previous experience with Demon Seeds.

Once the Demon Seed relic was mostly perfected, Vapula sold the information to other Princes -- it had been an interesting theoretical exercise for him, but was hardly Technological enough to keep as a trade secret. Vapulans and most other Servitors who use this method of "fast-growing" demonlings prefer to use the "secret surgical implant" method; demons of Kobal (Prince of Dark Humor) sneak them into breast implants, while those serving Andrealphus (Prince of Lust) . . . have other versions which don't require *surgical* insertion.

Note, though, that the Demon Seed was *mostly* perfected. Occasionally -- such as on Divine or Infernal Interventions - - something odd happens. The few cases where this has definitely happened were covered up by the demons involved. Still, there are stories of humans who developed the ability to tap celestial abilities, were granted all the Forces of the demonling within the Seed, or on the flip side, tales of demonlings who not only absorbed all the Forces and memories of the host, but also gained control of the body as a vessel!

Naturally, the forces of Heaven despise these relics. There are, of course, rumors that some of the more pragmatic Archangels attempt to use these to remove infernal Forces from Hellsworn sorcerers and Soldiers. (The infernal Force is the first one stolen, in such cases . . .)

Being attuned to a Demon Seed costs 1 character point per level (up to 6), allowing one to track it down for removal later. However, many demons don't bother with the attuning process, and simply attempt to keep track of the human hosts mundanely, or by keeping the human prisoner.

The person hosting the Demon Seed is generally weakened, listless, and appears to be suffering from a constant mild depression. (This depression will not respond to medication or even Songs or attunements!) As the Seed strips characteristics, it may seem as if the host has been having minor strokes.

(For **GURPS In Nomine**, a Contest of Wills is still performed with the demonling generally having Will 2-6, but the Seed steals one of ST, IQ, DX, HT, Will (taking levels of Strong Will or adding Weak Will), and Perception (Sense rolls; it takes levels of Alertness or adds Reduced Alertness). Once it's taken 4 points of any combination of these 6 "characteristics," it will steal a level of Power Investiture if the human possesses any; even if the human has no Power Investiture, the demonling will gain a level after taking 8 points of characteristics. Or, for the non-mechanics inclined, it strips them automatically every 6-12 months . . .)

Naturally, this relic may be removed from the **In Nomine** setting, for use by any callous supernatural entities who find it useful to ripen their young by stealing the spiritual energies of humans. Chest-bursting upon "hatching" is optional . . . but odd slithering sensations are recommended.

The Tides of Yool

by [Chad Underkoffler](#)

Genre: Swashbuckling Clockpunk Fantasy

Style: Action, Diplomacy, and Espionage

Themes: High Seas Adventure, International Politics, Hidden Agendas

Campaign Setting and Background Information

Yool is a fantasy world; all physical characteristics are Earth-like other than the size, shape, and number of the continents. There is a single moon, one fixed star, and five planets in the heavens of Yool's northern hemisphere.

This map shows approximately one-third of Yool's Northern Hemisphere. Asterisks show the sites of capital cities; dots show the sites of colony cities. National boundaries are left vague, but normally follow the courses of rivers or mountain ranges.

What Everybody Knows

Political Overview

(Note: Each realm has its own language, but utilizes Goldfolk script for transcribing purposes. A Zolovan-Goldfolk pidgin is the common trade tongue.)

- *The Empire of Kel-Batar.* The Empire is composed of a number of smaller nations collectively known as the Old Kingdoms. These include Aqadon, Batar, Del'Met, Fensh, Gilgul, Kel, Snorake, Tolez, and a few others (GMs, feel free to insert your own nations here). A half-millennia ago, the Iron Princess of Kel married the Prince of Batar, and from them the dynasty that would unite the Old Kingdoms sprang. The last scion of that bloodline is Emperor Artanis, a changeling who has ruled for over a century. Advised by the Council of Princes, he sits on the throne of the largest realm on Yool. Much of his time is spent manipulating his vassal kingdoms like chess pieces for unknown purposes. The hot-blooded youths of all the Old Kingdoms vie to join the Imperial Guard, known as the best marksmen in the world. The average Imperial citizen is semi-literate.

[Click to enlarge](#)



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Two of the other realms of Yool (Sythex and Zolova) are technically overgrown Old Kingdoms. Theoretically considered to be part of the Empire (they have seats on the Council of Princes), in practice they are sovereign nations and act as such. However, in deference to long tradition, their heads of state are not named King and Queen, but Duke and Duchess.

- *The Duchy of Sythex.* Duke Tazannan rules Sythex with an iron fist; his whim is what passes for justice. A cruel giant of a man, he hungers only for blood and warfare. He levies stiff taxes to fund his dream: the finest army on Yool. He dotes on his soldiers (especially cavalrymen) and their commanders, but treats his non-military subjects (even the aristocrats), with contempt; peasants are barely human in his eyes. In response to this tyranny, a rebel known only as "the Hare" fights against the Duke's injustice. The average Sythexian is illiterate.
- *The Duchy of Zolova.* Intrigue comes naturally to the inhabitants of Zolova, even more than in the other Old Kingdoms. By day, courtly love and gleaming chivalry is paid lip service; by night, the citizens go masked to torrid affairs and dark skullduggery. Every relationship is freighted with passion and treachery; every one of the noble Spice Houses keeps assassins on retainer. Money speaks louder in this land than any other on Yool: everything in Zolova has its price, and little is forbidden . . . at least, under moonlight. Women hold great power here: inheritance is tracked through the female line. Each merchant Spice House has a seat in the Chamber of

Matriarchs. The Duchess Cara Saffron leads the Chamber through copious bribes, forceful personality, keen insight, and utter ruthlessness. Although recently married to an elderly prince of House Vanilla, she still maintains a number of lovers -- it is enviously whispered that each night of the moon's cycle she sees a different suitor. The average Zolovan is semi-literate.

- *The Kingdom of Panohai.* Ruled by Young King Lao, Panohai is the most technologically advanced human realm. Panohain clocksmiths produce the finest clockworks, gearing, hydraulics, and other mechanical devices on Yool. Whether this focus on engineering and craftsmanship is due to the Panohain Technical College (a school subsidized by the royal family and open to any who can prove two degrees of aristocratic ancestors) or the presence of the Mainspring Cathedral, headquarters of the Church of the Celestial Orbs (which educates its Initiates nearly as well, but is open to all peasants who take vows), is an open question. A quiet, low-key Industrial Revolution is slowly growing, powered by the springs and flywheels of a handful of Adept Clocksmiths, though it is impeded due to the nature of enchantment (see below). Also of interest, Panohai has the closest ties of all the human realms with the Golden Isle -- the Goldfolk see the Panohain as "less insane" than most humans, and during the Great Purge, many changelings fled here. Thus, Panohai currently boasts the largest population of changelings on Yool. The average Panohain is literate.
- *The Golden Isle.* The land of the isolationist Goldfolk (see below) is alien to the humans of Yool. Those lucky travelers to the Golden Isle return with stories, mysteries, and wonders that defy description. The cities of the Goldfolk are structured and ordered; streets and canals lay in grids with diagonal avenues. Buildings rise taller than in any other realm of Yool and can be difficult for humans to navigate, given the Goldfolk preference for ladders and knotted ropes instead of stairs. Tall, densely packed, and linked by walkways and bridges, the buildings add a third confusing dimension to their cities. The Golden Isle is the only known source of silk on Yool, for which Goldfolk traders charge dearly. All attempts to discover its the provenance has failed miserably, and is one of the many reasons for the current cool relations between the Golden Isle and the Empire of Kel-Batar. The leader of the Goldfolk is called "the Wisest"; the current Wisest is a female named Rissa. All Goldfolk are literate.
- *Newland.* This continent -- discovered by humans 50 years ago -- is largely unexplored. Thus far, it appears uninhabited, but the crazed Zolovan explorer Lomo Nutmeg (see below) raves of ruined cities lost in the rain forests of the interior when he approaches lucidity. New plants and animals have been discovered, as well as abundant ores of minerals (including gold, platinum, and aluminum). Only four colony cities (Coldport, Spicetown, Port Vasil, and the City Zel) have been founded on the coasts of Newland (see map), but with the amount of money made by canny merchant-adventurers, more will definitely sprout up. Undoubtedly, the number of pirates preying on these rich merchant ships will increase as well. The fog-shrouded archipelago known as **The Maze** is where many of these "wolves of the sea" make their dens.

Realm	Blazon	Known For	Newland Colony City	Distance to Colony (in miles)
Kel-Batar	Gules, a pentagon or	Sculpture, mining, apples, pears, maize, pork, best marksmen.	Coldport	13,000
Sythex	Ermine, a deer sable	Singing/music, beef, dairy products, wheat, best soldiers.	Port Vasil	12,000
Zolova	Sable, a spider argent	Theater, trade, fish, flax, olives, citrus fruits, cooking, books, best sailors.	Spicetown	15,000
Panohai	Vert, a fish or	Poetry, clockwork, paper, wood, cotton, scholarship, teachers, fish, finished goods, books, Old World spices.	N/A	N/A
Golden Isle	Or, an arm couped bendwise proper	Dance, architecture, enchanted goods, silk, tropical fruits, strange ideas.	The City Zel	13,500

The Goldfolk: These peculiar humanoids have powers of the body exceeding that of humanity. They heal quickly, are stronger and more intelligent than the average human, and do not age. Indeed, some have interbred with humans, siring or bearing the hybrids known as changelings.

The Church of the Celestial Orbs: The Church of the Celestial Orbs is descended from a long tradition of horological clergy -- from the astrologers that scanned the heavens for omens, to the builders of calendrical menhirs. "Through understanding the celestial bodies, we understand our place in the cosmos." The doctrine of the Church is founded on a belief in two Elements -- Energy (represented by Father Daysun) and Matter (represented by Mother Nightmoon) -- uniting to produce the third Element: Time (represented by the unnumbered stars, birthed from Mother Nightmoon). In addition, there are two Aspects of being: Good and Evil. Everything in the universe is composed of Energy, Matter, and Time, and shaded by the dual Aspects. There is also a belief in a mysterious, unknowable Great Creator (also known as the Highest Clocksmith), who set it all in motion. Over the centuries, this theology had become rather less important than the study of the physical universe.

The Church is based in Panohai, in the Mainspring Cathedral, and is the widespread faith of the Old World . . . but subtle differences creep into its expression in each nation. In Zolova, Mother Nightmoon is strongly associated with the Aspect of Good, in the belief that following your heart and instincts is good, while Father Daysun is associated with the Aspect of Evil, in the belief that the harsh light of day forces hypocrisy. The reverse associations are present in Sytex -- Father Daysun/Good is seen as a model of virility, spirit, and machismo, while Mother Nightmoon/Evil is seen as the embodiment of weak will, lethargy, and cowardice. The Old Kingdoms are wildly variant, tending towards syncretism (co-opting of ancient pagan myths into Church dogma); the official line of the Empire of Kel Batar is an orthodox tradition of equal worship of all six combinations of Element and Aspect. Panohai itself gives primacy to the Element of Time, with no Aspecting. In general, the Goldfolk have mixed feelings about these beliefs, and few ascribe to them.

All Initiates in the Church -- who, male or female, must be of common blood and swear three vows (to seek knowledge, teach those who desire to be taught, and to "speak Truth, or not speak at all") -- gain an education second-to-none in the arts and sciences. Research is encouraged, both pure and practical . . . though more status is accorded to the practical. The Church organization is bureaucratic, with a bewildering number of titles and positions, yet all mesh together like gears and tick along with great efficiency. However, even a small particle of "grit" may cause those gears to grind together . . . Overseeing the entire clergy is the High Key, who directs the course of the mighty Church; the current High Key is a wizened man named Kaoli.

Magic: Hundreds of paths to occult power exist, be they techniques handed down for centuries or processes discovered through experimentation. Magic springs from deep knowledge of a particular vocation, craft, or art; it is not a distinct skill as such. Wizards who specialize in "spells" do not exist; rather, craftsmen and artists plumb the depths of their expertise, discovering methods to bring occult force to bear. Those who have achieved the transformational power of their profession are called Adepts. Those few with inborn genius of a craft are known as Prodigies (see below).

Magic is not necessarily about *what* you can do, but *how* you do it. Thus, there are no "fire mages": however an Adept Dancer could soft-shoe a bonfire into life, an Adept Blacksmith might call forth from a poker sparks from every fire whose embers it's stirred, or an Adept of Accountancy could add up a column of secret numbers causing the ledger to burst into flame. However, the medium influences the message: an Adept Sailor finds magic related to sailing -- mystic navigation, knot magic, or weather witchery -- much easier than demon summoning or mind-reading. Causing magical effects requires a short ritual -- improvised or rote -- in the idiom of the profession, and is mildly fatiguing.

Enchantment: Adepts of a craft can create permanent items that exceed normal limits or abilities. For example, an Adept Blacksmith could forge a usable sword out of any metal, or create "high tech" alloys -- like titanium steel -- in his forge; an Adept Cobbler could sew shoes that allow the wearer to walk on water; an Adept Shipwright could -- in theory -- design and build a craft that could sail beneath the ocean waves or above the clouds.

All enchantment must be done by an Adept (or a Prodigy, or a team of Adepts), and involves long, uninterrupted periods of time, rare materials, the proper alignment of the heavens, and so forth; the more potent the enchantment, the

more onerous the restrictions. Furthermore, all enchantment *permanently* reduces both the magical force and the *mundane* skill of the Adept, both which must be built up again by slow (re)mastery of their profession. Again, the more impressive the enchantment, the longer it takes to recoup power. In general, creation of efficiencies or exaggerations of function is less disabling -- say a year of skill and ability -- than miraculous additions or subtractions, which could absorb decades' worth of skill. Indeed, an Adept Shipwright who crafts an arcane waterproof hull may retain most of his Adept ability, while building a flying Sky-ship would burn his skills down to the fumble-fingered level of an apprentice. This limits widespread industrial enchantment, though it does happen on a tiny scale in Panohai and the Golden Isle. Indeed, most enchanted items come from the Goldfolk; their near immortality allows their Adepts to amass decades and centuries worth of skill to place into enchantments. Unfortunately, given the nature of Goldfolk Adeptness (see below), such enchantments are of a smaller scope than those of human Adepts.

Clockpunk: In essence, any technology involving springs, gears, cogs, flywheels, pulleys, or muscle-powered machines is advanced, as are some sectors of the disciplines of alchemy (chemistry) and engineering. Astronomy, biology, medicine, and physics follow slightly after (well ahead of Earth's during the Age of Sail). Accurate clocks and pocket watches are common; efficient water- and windmills exist. Clockwork navigation aids (like our Earth's [Antikythera Mechanism](#)) exist. Moveable type and mass printing are in use; Zolova and Panohai are the leaders in publishing. *Augmenting Engines* exist, which can increase muscle-power output; they are used in ocean travel in the form of clock tugs and emergency propulsion units.

While swords are still the weapon of choice, there is another weapon growing in popularity. The dart-gun or *stinger* is a refinement of the crossbow. The pistol form is comparable to an Earthly wheel lock pistol; the rifle form is equivalent to an Earth musket. Due to their expense, they are usually only available to officers or the wealthy. A stinger pistol can hold 3 darts in its internal magazine; the rifle holds 5 darts in removable magazines. Working the integral hand-crank to reset the powerful springs of a dart-gun takes on average twenty seconds. The main artillery and ship weapons of Yool are ballistae or *thunderbolts*. The dart-heads of ammunition are usually hollow, chambered, and packed with a variety of alchemical incendiaries, explosives, or preparations, like:

- *Panohai Phlogiston:* Two fluids that when mixed produce a highly flammable, viscous gel that will burn until completely smothered or doused by True Water.
- *True Water:* An oily liquid, True Water is a flame retardant, and extinguishes flames quickly -- even those of phlogiston.
- *Green Fog:* A three-part preparation of two liquids and a powder that when exposed to air creates an obscuring gas. Prolonged inhalation of Green Fog causes unconsciousness, then death.
- *Thunder Salt:* A whitish crystal, when mixed with phlogiston, explodes violently.

As the stinger becomes more prevalent on the battlefield, the wearing of armor has decreased; again, the expense (not to mention weight) of armor that can deflect or absorb the force of a stinger dart is prohibitive. Many officers still wear light chain shirts, or more commonly, specially-treated lightweight *cuir-boulli* to deflect shrapnel.

Travel: While magic, enchantment, and clockpunk technology have affected all sectors of transportation, they have impacted sea travel the most. The table below gives the motive power, qualities, and average speed of the most common classes of ship.

Name	Motive Power	Size	Construction	Speed	Maneuverability	Average Speed (in mph)
Clock Tug	Augmenting Engine	Tiny	Sturdy	Very Low, but strong	High	3
Sun Sloop	Sail	Small	Light	High	High	16

Twilight Cog	Sail	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium	12
Moon Caravel	Sail	Large	Sturdy	Low	Low	8
Star Carrick	Magic/Sail	Tiny to Small	Light	Fast	Medium	18
Goldfolk Windship	Balloon (for lift), Augmenting Engine (thrust)	Tiny	Fragile	Very Fast	High	30

(Note: To convert mph to nautical miles per hour (knots), multiply mph by 1.145 knots/mph.)

What Everybody Doesn't Know

Hidden Politics: What's going on under the surface . . .

- *The Empire of Kel-Batar.* Nearly 127 years ago, after a decade of repeated usurpation of the Imperial throne, the Council of Princes attempted to create a permanent figurehead Emperor by elevating the changeling child-prince Artanis to the purple. They surrounded him with servants, bodyguards, and luxuries, and essentially forgot about him -- as a changeling, he would survive for a good long time, and there would be no pesky heirs to worry about. For seventeen years, the Council ruled, not the Hidden Emperor, lost in sybaritic pursuits. Then, on a state visit to Sythex, he was rudely awakened to the nature of his position by being shut out of trade negotiations. Outwardly chastened -- but inwardly wrathful -- Artanis began applying his considerable intellect to manipulation, intrigue, and leadership. Within ten years, different men sat on the Council, their predecessors murdered, blackmailed, or exiled. A monarch with a will of iron replaced the powerless figurehead. Artanis' long-term goals include the reassimilation of Sythex and Zolova into the Empire, annexation of Panohai, and siring an heir. He pursues the first through covert maneuvering the two errant duchies against one another and the second through generous treaties and naval aid against Zolova. The third is problematic and vexing. He has been married twice to humans with no issue; he also attempted some "field research" with a Goldfolk naturalist before the cooling of relations with the Golden Isle. He suspects the truth about the limitations of changeling breeding (see below), but has yet to have tested it -- not for lack of trying. He is constrained on one hand by the requirement that his mate be a changeling, and on the other by the need for her to be of sufficiently noble blood for an heir to be recognized. Secretly, with the knowledge gained of his study of biology, he is manipulating families rumored to be descended from changeling blood into marriages, hoping to express the recessive traits and breed an aristocratic changeling bride. Two generations have already passed since he began his experiment; he estimates that it will take three more . . . but he has plenty of time.
- *The Duchy of Sythex.* Unknown to any but his closest friends, Duke Tazannan has been quietly assassinating noble families for their money and lands, to fund his war-machine. He's been stockpiling weapons for months, as he eyes Zolova to the East.
- *The Duchy of Zolova.* The Duchess Cara desires war with Sythex, but wants it to be on her terms. Her agents are quietly fomenting peasant unrest through sabotage, and from the coffers of House Saffron she funds the idealistic, populist highwayman known as the Hare.
- *The Kingdom of Panohai.* Young King Lao desires a colony in Newland, but pirates ravage Panohain ships. He wants closer ties with the Golden Isle, and is willing to do anything to get them. He has a secret, unrequited crush on the Duchess of Zolova. He is grateful to the Emperor for providing some naval assistance; but wants more.
- *The Golden Folk.* They have no secret agenda; they wish only to keep their distance from the insane humans that clutter the face of Yool. Their silk is woven from the webs of a rare indigenous spider.

Political Interaction Chart

This chart indicates current relations between realms, both the public position and the secret feelings behind them (in parentheses). No current treaties or alliances of note yet exist.

Realm	KB	S	Z	P	GI
Kel-Batar (KB)	(Emperor is manipulating Old Kingdom bloodlines -- including Sythex and Zolova through his agents.)	Reserved (Emperor sees Duke as a posturing ape.)	Cordial (Emperor respects Duchess' talent for intrigue.)	Cordial (Emperor is looking for a changeling bride amongst Panohain noble families.)	Poor (Emperor trying to reestablish ties.)
Sythex (S)	Neutral (Duke daydreams of conquering the Empire.)	(Duke sees his people as fodder for his dreams of conquest.)	Poor (Duke wishes to start a war . . . but only when his army is ready.)	Cordial (Duke wants advanced weaponry.)	Poor (Duke fears the military might of the Goldfolk.)
Zolova (Z)	Neutral (The Duchess knows of the Emperor's meddling in the politics of marriage, but hasn't figured out why.)	Poor (Duchess wants to start a war . . . but only when she's ready.)	(Duchess sees herself as protector of her people; however, if they get in the way of her personal machinations, too bad.)	Poor (Duchess respects their grasp of technology, but dislikes their lack of passion.)	Poor (Duchess angry with repeated Goldfolk attacks on their ships.)
Panohai (P)	Cordial (King needs access to Kel-Batar's mineral resources and naval support.)	Neutral (King sees Duke as warmongering moron.)	Poor (King fascinated by Duchess; hates Zolovan attacks on Panohai ships.)	(King desires to insure future of his people through a Newland colony.)	Cordial (King pushing hard for closer ties.)
Golden Isle (GI)	Poor (Insane, dangerous.)	Poor (Insane, violent.)	Poor (Insane, delusional.)	Neutral (Only mildly insane, often useful.)	(We are the only true sentients on the planet; one day, there will be a reckoning.)

The Enigmas of the Goldfolk: The old adage "A sound mind in a sound body" is more properly rendered "A sound mind **is** a sound body" when applied to the Goldfolk. It is unknown whether they are a separate species or an extreme human lineage. Compared to the average human, an average Goldfolk is strikingly intelligent, strong, nimble, and durable -- if a little hidebound and uninspired. Their skin tone ranges from a light tan (hence the "gold") to a deep ruddy brown; eye color is usually yellow, maple-brown, or hazel.

- *Physiology:* The Goldfolk have complete conscious access to all of their bodily functions and processes. While

they do not need to actively maintain autonomous activities (circulation, respiration, digestion), they can easily observe or change the operation of those processes -- increasing their healing rate, slowing their heartbeat and pulse, combating disease, building muscle tissue quickly, increasing or suppressing various neurotransmitters, dumping adrenaline into their bloodstream, ignoring (or undoing) the ravages of age, etc. Goldfolk are only sexually fertile when they desire to be; this ability to choose has strong effects on Goldfolk culture. Goldfolk tired of life can opt to stop their hearts and die.

- *Psychology*: The understanding and control of their own brain function lends the Goldfolk a markedly different psychology. Goldfolk tend not to be nostalgic for the past or yearn for the future; they are solidly in the here and now. They understand why they are feeling an emotion, and can alter those emotions if necessary. They accept the demands of their bodily natures; there is no shame or guilt associated with biological functions, like excretion, digestion, or reproduction. Their powers of concentration are tremendous, but they can be deficient in raw imagination and are resistant to sweeping innovation. Goldfolk dream only by choice, and those dreams are always lucid.
- *Views On & Historical Dealings With Humanity*: Simply: humans are insane. Too much contact with their madness could infect a Goldfolk; and once a Goldfolk's mind goes, the body follows. This belief leads directly to the isolationist movement. Historically, the balance shifts over time; while always reserved, sometimes Goldfolk welcome the influx of human ideas, at others they become utterly xenophobic. Often, this animosity bleeds forth to taint changelings as well. Twenty years ago, the Goldfolk went through **the Great Purge**, attempting to efface all human and changeling influence and presence on the Golden Isle. Many humans and changelings were killed; a few escaped to Panohai, the human nation most akin to the Golden Isle. Today, the first tentative feelers are being sent out to see what the humans are up to.
- *Culture of the Goldfolk*: Supreme self-confidence is axiomatic, and underpins much of Goldfolk culture. In all endeavors, the inhabitants are highly competitive; luckily, they are good sportsmen. Cheating is discouraged, unless couched in a meta-textual way -- reinterpreting rules for greatest personal benefit is looked on as a form of art. Otherwise, their ways seem impenetrable to the human realms. A democratic meritocracy -- with universal suffrage, no less -- seems like pure anarchy. All Goldfolk may speak in the Great Assembly, which meets biannually to enact, revoke, and review the laws of the land, as well as deal with pressing issues; the necessary quorum to convene is one thousand citizens. The leader of the Assembly (and thus the Golden Isle) is known as "the Wisest," and attains that position by solving the physical and mental puzzles left by their predecessor (even in cases of usurpation, abdication, or votes of "no confidence" from the Assembly). As the Goldfolk are hardy and nigh immortal, each Wisest has plenty of time to construct their Puzzle before death, ejection, or voluntary return to private life. The longest interregnum between reigns -- eight months -- happened seven years ago after the Great Purge. A young (233 years old) Goldfolk woman named Rissa -- an Adept Cartographer and Adept Weaver -- solved the Puzzle of the Coded Tapestry and became Wisest.
- *Interbreeding (Changelings)*: When Goldfolk choose to mate with humans, a changeling results. Changelings have the same gender, skin tone, and hair color as their human parent; their eyes, however, are violet, gray, or eerie silver. They have limited form of the Goldfolk unity of mind and body, which allows great longevity (though not nigh immortality) and uncanny healing; they combine these qualities with a more human level of creativity and imagination. They are sterile with Goldfolk and with humans; a changeling can only breed with another changeling. The issue of a changeling unions are human, with a high possibility of being a human Prodigy. Changelings are the "wild children" of the Goldfolk, and often suffer great prejudice.

Mysteries of Magic: Due to the time requirement to fully plumb the depths of a profession to reach Adept status (about 20 years of dedicated work), most humans can only ever become Adept in a single trade. Perhaps one out of every hundred masters in a craft are Adepts. Due to their longer lifespans, changelings and Goldfolk can become Adept in multiple vocations. An Adept with more than two fields of mastery is rare. More than half of all changelings are Adepts; almost every Goldfolk is one.

There is a balancing factor, however: while those of Goldfolk blood have greater breadth of skill, humans have more depth. For unclear reasons, humans have access to greater amounts of magical power, and can cause superior effects with their abilities. Theories on why this is so abound: the two most popular are:

1. Since they can only generally reach Adept status in one trade, humans concentrate more on that trade; and
2. Changelings and Goldfolk are already constantly using magic to support and enhance their bodies, leaving less

capacity for Adept occult force.

There are also Prodigies -- those that reach Adept status without the customary two decades of study. Prodigies can craft enchantments with only a *temporary* loss of skill (usually a few days or weeks); the lost ability is slowly remembered rather than relearned. While almost common amongst humans, there have been less than a score of Changeling Prodigies, ever. There have *never* been any Goldfolk Prodigies.

Secrets of Technology: In terms of Earth-technologies, two developments are singled out for special discussion: the steam engine and black powder. Viable steam engines have yet to materialize, but the Goldfolk have begun some promising research. Black powder is a recent discovery by an Imperial alchemist, and is beginning to see use as an explosive, despite the relative pitfalls of transporting it versus the multi-part alchemical preparations like thunder salt. Outside of some experimental usage, no one has yet used it as a propellant charge.

There is a pervasive legend of an alchemical elixir that will transform a human into a Goldfolk. This preparation is known as the Fluid of the Sun, and takes on many of the same qualities of the Earthly Philosopher's Stone.

The Goldfolk have recently developed a small fleet of six *windships* -- see Izzy's craft in *The Mummy Returns* for an example of what they look like. Gasbags provide lift; while Augmenting Engines connected to a bicycle-like arrangement provide propulsion. Crew complement is limited to four people with food and water; or six people without supplies. The human realms have heard rumors of this craft, but have not received any credible reports (for instance, none of them have mentioned the gasbags).

NPC Backgrounds

Captain Kristov Nikolai aka Whitebeard: (Adept Sailor, Prodigy Toymaker). The son of one of the Goldfolk's finest ship captains and a human pirate, Kristov grew up on his mother's ship, learning the sailor's life. He loved to whittle, and in time discovered that he possessed a gift for toymaking. In his nimble fingers, a block of wood could become a pod of playful dolphins . . . and he learned that he could make those dolphins actually sport and play. In his fortieth year, the Great Purge happened; as a changeling, his shipmates seized him and placed him in a cell to await execution with other changelings and a few unlucky humans then visiting the Golden Isle. An expert brawler and good swordsman, Kristov led his fellow prisoners in an escape; they fought their way to the harbor and stole a warship, making for the high seas. During the passage to the mainland, a Sythexian navy vessel refused them aid, then attempted to take the Goldfolk ship as a prize (to learn its military secrets). The refugees fought off the Sythexians, albeit with heavy losses. Swearing revenge on his foes, Kristov began attacking all Sythexian and Goldfolk ships whose wake crossed the bow of his ship, the *Wave Dasher*: Whitebeard the Pirate was born. Whitebeard is a knight-errant pirate, providing succor to those in need on the seas, and redistributing wealth to those oppressed Sythexian peasants along the coasts. He will not harm a fellow changeling; indeed, he'll often give them a small gift -- a magical toy that suits them. Unknown to anyone but his most trusted subordinates, he holds a (retroactive) letter of marque against Sythex -- a gift from his "brother" changeling, Emperor Artanis, for unspecified services. He wears an eye-patch after losing his left eye in a recent sortie; it hasn't regrown yet.

Sir Lomo Nutmeg: (Prodigy Linguist). Despite his best efforts, Lomo Nutmeg is a horrible merchant-adventurer. He spent much of his youth on the docks, speaking to the dirty foreigners in their own languages rather than learning the ways of commerce. His aunt Patrice, matriarch of the Zolovan House Nutmeg, dispatched him to the Spicetown colony to get him out of her sight. They were both happier. Fascinated by the new plants and animals of the continent, Lomo soon arranged an expedition to explore the interior of Newland. He felt he could serve his House best by seeking out new treasures for them to trade. He and his hundred men entered the forest in high spirits; one year later, Lomo returned alone, haggard, scarred, and raving, holding an ruby the size of a cantaloupe. Incoherent, all that could be understood of his babbling were the phrases "snakes with legs," "giant bugs," and "the lightning that walks like a man." The factors of House Nutmeg packed him back to Zolova for treatment, and mounted an expedition to follow Lomo's -- they never returned. Lomo is currently recuperating in a Church Hospital in Zolova; his madness seems to be slowly easing. One day soon, he may be able to speak of what he saw in Newland.

Commander Mirabelle: (Adept Sailor, Adept Swordsman). Mirabelle is a Naval Officer of the Goldfolk. She serves under Captain Zeltar, the most famous ship captain of recent Goldfolk history -- he discovered Newland a hundred years ago -- a half-century before the humans knew it was there. She has political ambitions, and always attends the Great Assembly if she can. She doesn't like humans, but actively hates changelings. She's been urging her captain to pursue Whitebeard and bring him to Goldfolk "justice" for the murders and piracy he's undertaken against the Golden Isle. Zeltar seems resistant (he was one of Kristov's mothers lovers, long ago), but she presses the point, slowly wearing him down.

Lord General Hars Doyvik: A childhood chum of Duke Tazannan, Lord Doyvik is the Sythexian general of cavalry. He is involved with the Duke's bloodthirsty plan to raise monies for the military through assassination, and it is his forces that the mysterious Hare most often harries. He is a good swordsman, but only an average tactician, and has embarrassingly poor social skills.

Major Maximilio Vasterhaus, Viscount of Platt: Maximilio Vasterhaus entered the Imperial Guard as an Ensign, and through his expert marksmanship, masterful swordplay, and remarkable social graces, he has risen through the ranks rapidly. He's arrogant, earnest, and loud. As a good storyteller, passable dancer, and heir to County Platt, he is welcome at the parties thrown by the Old Kingdom aristocracy. He cannot hold his drink, however, and often gets himself in amusing difficulties when he's in his cups.

Lord Villem Baatz aka The Hare: (Prodigy Swordsman). Heir of a military household, Villem Baatz is an embarrassment to his father and younger brother. Instead of serving Sythex through buying a commission in the military -- as his father did in the army a decade ago, and as his brother currently does in the navy -- Villem spends his time "managing the estates" or frittering it away on indolence. Or so they all think -- secretly, Villem is the Hare, the masked highwayman and rebel who fights against the oppression of the Duke's military regime. He is an expert actor, good marksman, and a competent tactician . . . but as the Hare, his inflated sense of honor and chivalry gets him into troubles he could avoid.

Initiate June Grace: Born of Panohain peasant stock, June Grace is the first daughter to enter the Church, to the pride of her family. After many years of study at her local Church School, she passed the entrance exam for Mainspring Cathedral, eventually graduating and taking a teaching position there. While at the Cathedral, she developed an interest in the cultures and cuisine of other realms. An expert alchemist by training, she is also a good cook. Currently, she has decided to take a sabbatical from her teaching, to travel to the New World to look for new alchemical processes, foods, and flavors -- and possibly romance.

Events & Possible Story Arcs

- *Colonization.* Panohai is desperate to found a colony in the New World, and there are a number of plots afoot. Young King Lao is secretly sending out messengers to pirates known to operate in the Sea of Stars, offering amnesty to them if they agree to not attack Panohain vessels, and other rewards if they serve as convoy guards. PCs could be these messengers, the pirates so contacted, or other skilled persons -- like merchants, farmers, or engineers -- necessary to build a new colony.
- *Birth of a Princess.* The royal family of Snoorake has finally produced an heir: the Princess Cedbodea. A grand fete is being held in her honor three months hence in the Imperial capital; noble families throughout the Old World have been invited. The Duchess of Zolova and the Emperor himself are coming, as well as a host of lesser lights from Sythex, Panohai, and the Church. It will be the social occasion of the year. Opportunities for intrigue, espionage, and romance abound. PCs of noble blood or churchly inclination may receive an invitation; other PCs may be called upon to help arrange entertainment, gifts, food, or security.
- *Spice of Danger.* A peculiar new herb from Newland has become incredibly popular in Zolova. Known as *wincobak*, it has a rich and satisfying - some say addictive -- flavor. Currently, one pound of dried wincobak seedpods brings twice its weight in gold. The PCs "inherit" (through fair means or foul) a map indicating the location of an untapped stand of plants, inland from the Parrot Sea. Can they get there before anyone else discovers the trove, avoid the patrols of the City Zel, then return to the land of the Spice Houses without losing their cargo to pirates? The rewards -- and dangers -- are great.

Advice, Opportunities, & Pitfalls

Swashbuckling: Swashbuckling is all about style -- the more something looks flashy, melodramatic, or just plain cool, the better. Over the top passion is good. Everything should have a sense of fun about it: secret passages, romantic tragedies, and devious plots. Larger than life and cinematic is the way to go. Note that this doesn't mean that there aren't negative consequences for actions: if the success knob is cranked to eleven, so is the failure knob. When something goes wrong, it really goes wrong. The two biggest pitfalls to avoid are: too much campiness and overshadowing the PCs. One man's camp is another man's "over-the-top", pay close attention to when the laughter-to-groan ratio shifts; in regards to stealing the PC's spotlight, be sensitive to the amount of screen-time given to your descriptions versus the amount the players use to describe their actions.

Clockpunk: The point of this divergent path of technology is not to simply replicate Earthly technologies, but to seek out and develop new paths and combinations. PCs could certainly devote time and effort to invent cannon, but by the time they've completed work, other clockwork technologies will have moved forward.

Espionage/Intrigue: Plots swirl within plots, and realms pay well for the secrets of their neighbors. One way to provide a patina of intrigue to a game is to determine what a character wants, then determine what they want it to look like they want. If Lord Apgor wants Lady Bella's castle, perhaps he pursues it by wooing her -- while funding a bandit gang to terrorize her peasants. Particularly tricky characters, like Artanis and Cara Saffron, will have two or three levels of deception between what they want and what they appear to want.

Pyramid Review

The Last Dance (for d20)

Published by [Atlas Games](#)

Designed by Chris Aylott

38 b&w pages; \$9.95

Atlas Games' *Penumbra* series was the first of the independent *d20* lines to hit the industry, and under the guidance of John Nephew and company, it continues to be one of the best. *The Last Dance* is another fine example.

Designed for relatively low-level adventurers (a group of 4th to 6th level), *The Last Dance* is very simple . . . on the surface. There's not a lot of traveling, and most of the action takes place in a single room -- the great hall of a border fortress, where a peace treaty between neighboring orcs and humans is being celebrated with a grand dance.

[BEGIN SPOILER ALERT]

It's a wonderful party, except for the fact that it's been going on for a thousand years or so . . . and everybody's dead.

It's a story of ambition, betrayal, arrogance . . . and dancing. The Last Dance in the title is not a metaphor. Dancing is a crucial part of this adventure, and while players could treat the whole exercise as an abstract puzzle to solve, it will be much more fun if they get into it. (The publishers claim that in the playtests, players actually got up from around the table and *danced*.) If your players aren't up to that sort of participation, or at least willing to get into the spirit of things, *The Last Dance* might not be the adventure for them.

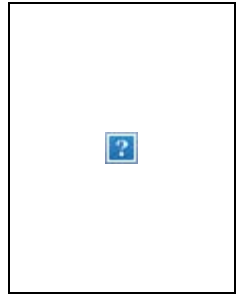
Don't get me wrong -- it's not like you have to be an SCA-trained pavane-loving fool to enjoy this adventure. But it's more than just hack and slash, and that's a good thing. Never fear -- there are also enough combat opportunities to keep your power gamers happy, but oddly enough, many of them involve dancing as well.

Getting into the adventure isn't necessarily easy, and this may be its greatest weakness. The player-characters encounter a beggar-ish looking sort of a man who wants them to follow him to the adventure site. Getting the group to do this might be difficult, however, because the man a) is dead; b) has had his throat slashed so as to make speech impossible; and c) only knows a language that has not been used for a thousand years or so, making his slashed throat and overall dead-ness sort of a moot point. The GM and players must be ready for an elaborate game of charades (including rudimentary dance lessons!) just to get the ball rolling. And once the adventurers figure *that* out (and let's face it, they better, or the story is over before it starts), they face similar communication problems with all the NPCs they encounter. (Well, all but one . . .) Depending on your players, this can be enjoyed as a fun and interesting challenge, or it can become a huge pain in the butt.

Of course, most roleplaying these days aspires to be more than just exercises in killing monsters and taking their treasure, so all these features are -- in my mind -- very good things. And unless your group looks at the folks in *Knights of the Dinner Table* as role models instead of objects of satire, they will enjoy *The Last Dance*, too. This adventure can be tossed into just about any campaign as a one-shot diversion. It's perfect for a group who have just completed a quest, or cleaned out a dungeon, and are on their way to their next conquest.

[END SPOILER ALERT]

As in all *Penumbra* releases, Atlas Games provides more than just an adventure. The author also includes several new magic items, a new minor artifact that is both potentially powerful and ruinous, and a new monster that will turn some



of your characters' strengths against them in a very nasty way. There's good loot to be had, but not enough to unbalance your campaign, and a few reality-bending tricks with the time-space continuum that will keep your players on their toes -- even when they're not on the dance floor.

The Last Dance is very clean editorially, well-written and easy to follow. There isn't a whole lot of art inside, which is probably a good thing since I'm not a big fan of David Interdonato's style. But that's just a taste thing, and I should mention that his front cover painting is very nice. So bring your dancing shoes and dive right in -- *The Last Dance* is about to begin . . .

--Scott D. Haring

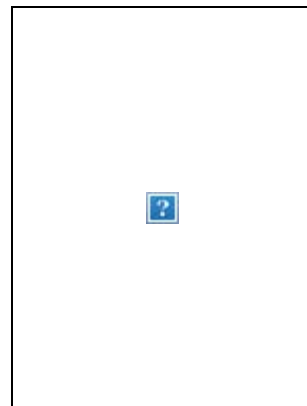
Pyramid Review

Terra Incognita -- The NAGS Society Handbook

Published by [Grey Ghost Games](#)

Written by Scott Larson

144-page perfect bound, \$22.95



The latest entry into the burgeoning range of RPGs during the Victorian era is *Terra Incognita -- The NAGS Society Handbook*, published by Grey Ghost Games. It is designed for use with Steffan O'Sullivan's *Fudge* roleplaying game, and was actually play tested by subscribers to Steve Jackson Games' *Pyramid Magazine* as well as gamers at [fudgerpg.com](#). Although the basic rules for the *Fudge* are available at Grey Ghost Games' website, the potential *Terra Incognita* GM will find all of the rules he needs in the book itself. The only thing he will need to actually run the game will be a set of *Fudge* dice, although these rules do suggest other means to simulate the system's mechanics.

The setting for *Terra Incognita* is actually a ninety-year period, beginning in 1850 and running through the Victorian and Edwardian periods to beyond the First World War and the pulp decades of the twenties and thirties. Outwardly a straight historical game, players create characters that work in secret as members of the semi-secret NAGS or "National Archaeological, Geographical, and Submarine Society." A member -- known as a Nag -- is devoted to the Earth Unknown, to exploring the planet's mysteries and wonders with the aim of furthering mankind's knowledge, yet at the same preventing them from becoming general knowledge and possibly lost through misuse. Such knowledge is held by the society until they feel that the rest of the world is ready to accept it. An example of this was the public excavation of Tutankhamen's Tomb in 1923, which came a decade after the society had actually opened and forced them to quickly return the artifacts they had removed for examination! When something odd crops up, an RFA -- or Request for Attention -- is issued to a suitable group of Nags, who will investigate and take any necessary action. RFAs often come to the society as discrete requests through private channels after the authorities have been unable to deal with the issue at hand.

Recruitment to the society is by invitation only, and often comes after the potential recruit has been exposed to the Terra Incognita and has useful skills that can be brought to bear upon the situation. Members can maintain a public profile, but some are recruited by "societal extraction" and thus may continue the works of NAGS in secret. In more extreme situations, explorers and adventurers are recruited after their supposed death -- noted examples of this include the aviatrix Amelia Earhart, the Antarctic explorer Robert Falcon Scott, and author Jack London.

Once recruited, members select an AoS, or Area of Speciality, reflecting their background and experience: Bookworm, Gadgeteer, Hack, Hero, Preservationist, or Snoop. Bookworms conduct general research for the NAGS, while the Snoop is more concerned with theoretical research within a single field, and Gadgeteers build new technology and devices for use during society operations. The public face of the society is the Hack, who as journalists and photojournalists contribute to the NAGS journal, which reports on events and operations that took place ten years previously. Heroes are the society's tacticians, capable of providing any needed direct action. The Preservationist is classified as either "Red" or "Green." The atypical Green Preservationist is a natural scientist devoted to investigating and preserving eco-systems, while his Red counterpart is more concerned with matters archaeological and anthropological.

The concept of the Area of Speciality is reflected in the rules, which suggest that each player selects an AoS template as the basis for their character. Each template gives a range of options that can be followed to build the type of character a player wants to design. Each template recommends what skills to buy, where to focus attributes and which gifts and faults to select. These recommendations are by no means rigid, so that if a player wanted their character to be

a cartographer, then all but the Gadgeteer template could be utilized to create this character. Accompanying each AoS description is a full example -- this is in addition to the example of character creation -- although I had to give a groan when I read that the Gadgeteer example's nickname was "Q." In fact, the six Nags given here make up a sample team and it is pleasing to note that these characters come from a differing range of cultures and backgrounds, rather than from a primarily Imperial background.

For those with familiarity with the *Fudge* system, it uses the "Five Point *Fudge*" system to buy broad and narrow skill foci across six categories of skills. This is relatively quick and easy, having been designed for those new to the game. Two other methods of character creation, the subjective -- in which the GM and player assign the game statistics based upon the player's concept, and the objective, in which each player is given a set amount of points, are presented for use by more experienced players.

Beyond the standard Fudge rules for combat and event resolution, *Terra Incognita* provides the team with a range of NAGS tech and vehicles. Known for their glitches almost as much for their ingenuity, both vehicles and gadgets fall into two eras. The first is Victorian steampunk and the second is the era of the pulps, though the concentration is definitely upon the 19th century. Most are the steampunk equivalent of standard cyberpunk gear, but the Travelling Tea Tray or T3, which is a vacuum-packed, portable and instant tea party set possesses a certain charm. Beyond attempting to resolve glitches upon either tech or vehicles, there is little guidance for the Gadgeteer who wants to construct their own devices.

Up until now the rules have been successfully geared to running a Victorian-era game, with occasional mention of running a pulp-era game. So what of the setting and campaign in which a *Terra Incognita -- The NAGS Society Handbook* game can be run? Essentially, apart from the idea that the characters work for a semi-secret benevolent organization, there is scant background detail. There is a background framework, consisting of a ninety-year almanac covering the years 1850 to 1940, and details of the society's secret campuses on each of the continents, but no actual information about the hidden world. The campuses even include Mt. Erebus on Antarctica . . . where do you think Captain Scott ended up?

A few pages cover the types of *Terra Incognita* campaigns and adventures that can be run, including how to combine the society with other genres and on how to run an actual NAG operation. The campaign advice discusses briefly the nature of the hidden world: mysterious history -- investigating the myths of Atlantis and lost worlds; ghost tales -- with or without the supernatural; expanded reality, which hints at the supernatural; dashing tales for those that want more elements in their game; or even adding elements of fantasy ala *Castle Falkenstein*.

[BEGIN SPOILER ALERT!]

An example mysterious history campaign outline is given, "The Pangaea Prophecy," which suggests that descendants of the inhabitants of the ancient giant continent of Pangaea were still alive and living under the Earth. The NAS Legend, a society dirigible that can serve as the base of operation for a team of Nags and provides more characters that can be used by the players or as NPCs, supports the campaign. This can be kicked with a starting scenario, also included in the book. In "Moctezuma's Revenge," the team receive an RFA that takes them to Mexico City where a girl has been found ritually sacrificed atop a recently discovered Aztec temple. They have to investigate while dealing with a revivalist Aztec movement, a would-be American millionaire showman, a Mexican politician on the make, and the Mexican government, which includes the ridiculously named "National Department of Widgets." It is a pity that this adventure is set in the pulp era, when the main focus of the game seems to be set squarely upon the 19th century. It almost seems as if the author wants us to ignore seventy years of time already outlined in the almanac.

[END SPOILER ALERT]

This is not helped when throughout the book there are mentions of important NAG operations that have had consequences upon the society. The exact nature of these is not expanded upon; for example, we are not told why Theodore Roosevelt led an expedition into the Brazilian jungle and what transpired there.

The problem is that once you look beyond the National Archaeological, Geographical, and Submarine Society, *Terra Incognita* seems a rather shallow game. It is up to the GM to decide upon the nature of the depth -- the "Incognita" in

the game's name -- and add it to his campaign to give it depth. There are hints aplenty in the almanac, but there is all that they are . . . just hints. It is again left for the GM to develop these and he cannot do that from the information provided in this book. Instead, he will need to make use of the appendix describing further watching and reading, which is at least useful, if short. Interestingly, two books that are included as both reference and inspiration are Ken Hite's *Suppressed Transmission* and *Suppressed Transmission 2*, which are also directly referenced earlier in the text. (As an aside, I amused to see that Chicago has a "Hite Building," the fiftieth floor of which was the last location of the Lost Amulet of the Motocs!) It is not so much that these are potentially useful references for the *Terra Incognita* GM, as they are an absolute necessity if they want to develop their game. Likewise, other RPGs are included in this appendix as background reading, but while games and supplements such as *Space 1889*, *Castle Falkenstein*, and *GURPS Steampunk* might have inspired the author, they also ultimately have the background material that Terra Incognita does not.

The rules in *Terra Incognita -- The NAGS Society Handbook* will no doubt be of use should a GM want to run their own Victorian-era game using the *Fudge* system. Even the concept of the "National Archaeological, Geographical, and Submarine Society" as a campaign framework has merit, providing means and method for getting characters involved in an adventures and NAG operations. Yet it is in the details that the game fails us, forcing the purchaser to conduct much of the necessary research needed to run a game or to buy further books which have the background that that this game does not. Strangely, these further books have not been written with *Terra Incognita* specifically in mind, but for entirely different game systems instead.

--Matthew Pook

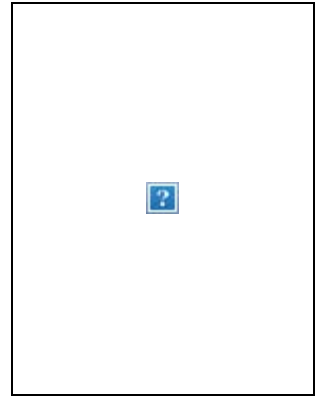
Pyramid Review

Denver (for Hell on Earth RPG)

By [Pinnacle Entertainment Group](#)

Written by Teller

\$20.00



Denver, written by Teller for Pinnacle Entertainment Group, details the headquarters city for General Throckmorton's Combine, the major villain of the Wasted West of the *Hell on Earth RPG*. Readers should prepare themselves for a well-written sourcebook, detailing a dark, dangerous, and devastated city. Heavily influenced by post-apocalyptic film, Denver presents a darkly familiar setting for players and gamemasters alike. Although familiar, there are enough new and unusual twists to the setting to keep players guessing. In addition to detailing the city, Denver provides players with a new organization for character development (or creation): The Steel Knights, a group of power-armored soldiers, and the types of armor available. Finally, one of the mysteries of the Hell on Earth setting is revealed in the adventure "Air Force One is Down." While targeted at a mature reader, Denver is worth the price of admission.

The city and history of Denver is detailed enough for posse members and Marshals alike, including tidbits of the alternate history of the *Deadlands/Hell on Earth* timeline (the atom bomb that ended World War II, for example, was dropped on Berlin). While the nuclear attacks on Denver were thwarted by Hellstromme Industries' (HI) shields, it suffered several conventional and biological attacks that devastated the population. The interim between the arrival of Throckmorton and his sudden shift in personality following his gaining control of the HI weapon factories is also covered, providing players with a connection to Denver with enough information to flesh out their character's background. Likewise, those players with former Black Hat characters will find a lot in this supplement, although these sections, including the one detailing Combine equipment, is located in the Marshal's section.

While expanding options for existing characters, *Denver* also details a new organization: The Steel Knights. This elite group of power-armored Robo-Hunters, based on the remnants of the US Iron Brigade, provides players who dislike the Templars a chivalric option. More importantly, however, this section revises the rules for power armor initially published in the Wasted West world book, accounting for the changes found in *The Junkman Cometh*. It also greatly expands the options available, giving players a chance to choose from several different types of armor (US, CS, HI, German, and LatAm models) and to customize their battle suits.

(SPOILER ALERT: Information normally available only to the Marshal is included below.)

The dedication to Charleton Heston, in honor of his role in *Omega Man*, gives an early indication of post-apocalyptic film as a major inspiration for the *Denver* sourcebook. While *Omega Man* does get a nod in the Family, a light-hating group led by Matthias Newcombe, the major influence is undoubtedly from the *Terminator* series of films. Not only does the name of Denver's resistance leader, John Connor, echo that movie, much of the artwork honors those two films by James Cameron. More immediately, however, is the theme of man versus machine that runs through the sourcebook. For example, the reason for Throckmorton's change of heart upon reaching Denver is finally given: his personality has been overwhelmed after interfacing with the Hellstromme Industries AI, created from the brains of the mad scientists employed by Hellstromme during the 19th, 20th, and 21st Centuries. This AI was given structure by the copying of Darius Hellstromme's personality. Driven mad by the Reckoning, the AI is planning Judgment Day II. While the Denver AI's inspiration comes straight from *Terminator* films' Skynet, the merging of man and machine gives it a liberating twist that will keep players guessing.

The Combine is not the only threat detailed in this sourcebook. The denizens of Denver and the surrounding area are

enough to give the most experienced posses a challenge -- and the creeps. Denver's roach population, which has grown in size, intelligence, and, in some cases, stature is creepily disgusting. More disturbing is the presence of Nazi doctors lead by Mengele, stored by the Agency deep beneath their Denver headquarters, taking up their concentration camp experimentation once more. Finally, the adventure "Air Force One is Down," which finally reveals what happened to President Tremane and the missing Air Force One, once more allowing players to become a major part of the Wasted West storyline -- although this adventure should be run after the events in *The Boise Horror* in order to ensure your posse is up to the challenge.

Purchasers should be aware that this supplement, which details the headquarters of the Wasted West's bad guys, is very dark in tone. While it is true that this can serve to make the actions of the players feel more heroic though the sharp contrast, the book is targeted at a relatively mature audience. In addition, recent events, which could not have been foreseen by the writer, publisher, or players, may make Marshals wish to weigh changing the location of part of "Air Force One is Down" -- the American Trade Center (based on the World Trade Center).

(END SPOILER ALERT)

If you and your posse are ready for it, the *Denver* sourcebook offers a lot for a *Hell on Earth* campaign, and is well worth the money for anyone moving anywhere close to Denver or are confronting the Combine. For those who want to keep up with the unfolding meta-story of the *Hell on Earth* setting, this is a must buy, as the events of the adventure provide a major plot point.

--*Matthew M. DeForrest*

Horror, Horror, Horror: *Macbeth*

*"Come, go we to the king; our power is ready;
Our lack is nothing but our leave; Macbeth
Is ripe for shaking, and the powers above
Put on their instruments."
-- William Shakespeare, Macbeth, IV:iii:236-240*

Once more the nights grow long, once more the year dies, once more the banked fires of history flare up. Again we look into the magickal, the mysterious, even the malevolent shadows flung up by the flames of [Shakespeare's words](#). What shadow game he played at, thrusting witches and regicide at a king who had reason to fear both, may be lost in the "shoals of time." All we have are the words, the necromantic figure of Macbeth, and the story begun by three weird sisters.

*"Great Glamis! worthy Cawdor!
Greater than both, by the all-hail hereafter!
Thy letters have transported me beyond
This ignorant present, and I feel now
The future in the instant."
-- William Shakespeare, Macbeth, I:iv:55-59*

Shakespeare's plot for *Macbeth* is both well-known and straightforward. Macbeth and Banquo, two generals under King Duncan of Scotland, meet three witches on a corpse-strewn battlefield. The witches prophesy that Macbeth, already Thane of Glamis, will become Thane of Cawdor, and then king. Their murky oracles foretell that Banquo will beget kings. When Macbeth learns of his elevation to Thane of Cawdor, he and his wife begin to plot the murder of Duncan to hasten the prophecy along. When Duncan stays the night at Macbeth's castle, he kills the King while his Porter drunkenly invokes the Gates of Hell, opening for a damned soul. Duncan's son Malcolm flees to England, which casts suspicion on him, leaving Macbeth to be acclaimed king. Unwilling to see Banquo's sons inherit his throne, however, Macbeth has Banquo murdered -- unfortunately, Banquo's son Fleance escapes. Banquo's ghost, however, appears at Macbeth's feast, a harbinger of doom.

Unnerved, Macbeth now demands a new meeting with the witches; they warn him to beware Macduff (the Thane of Fife), but assure him that no man born of woman can harm him and that furthermore he cannot lose until Birnam Wood moves uphill to Dunsinane Castle. Macbeth murders Macduff's family, but Macduff has escaped to England. After a suspicious Malcolm tests Macduff's loyalty, the two join forces and invade Scotland. Lady Macbeth, driven mad with guilt, commits suicide; Macbeth confronts the invaders, who are besieging Dunsinane while camouflaged with boughs from Birnam Wood. He kills many foes during the battle, but falls to Macduff, who as a child "from his mother's womb untimely ripped" can kill Macbeth. Malcolm is proclaimed King of Scotland amidst the battlefield carnage, completing the circle of the play.

*"Witches: Seek to know no more.
Macbeth: I will be satisfied: deny me this,
And an eternal curse fall on you! Let me know,
Why sinks that cauldron? and what noise is this?"
-- William Shakespeare, Macbeth, IV:i:103-106*

Shakespeare took the basics of the play from Raphael Holinshed's 1577 *Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland*, although he altered [the circumstances of Duncan's murder](#) and interpolated the three witches from Andrew of Wyntoun's *Orygynale Chronicle* of 1420. Holinshed took his story from Hector Boece's 1526 *Scotorum Historiae*, and Boece took it from the medieval *Scotichronicon* of John Fordun. It all traces back to the historical King Macbeth, who killed Duncan around 1040 and reigned (competently enough) until he was killed in turn by Malcolm in 1057. Banquo, on the other hand, was a fictional character invented by Boece to provide a suitably noble ancestor for the House of Stuart, by then the Kings of Scotland, and eventually, in the person of King James I, the ruling house of England as

well. Shakespeare's play was most likely first performed for that King on August 7, 1606, during a visit from King Christian IV of Denmark.

And during that very first performance, Hal Berridge, the actor who was to play Lady Macbeth, died of a fever backstage -- the first of many sacrifices to the "curse of the Scottish play." An Amsterdam performance in 1672 saw the actor playing Duncan actually murdered onstage when the daggers were switched; the opening of the play in London in 1703 brought a disastrous storm that killed 123 people. Riots broke out during performances in 1721 in London and 1849 in New York, the latter killing 31 people. In Olivier's first performance in the role, in 1937, the founder of the theater (another would-be Lady Macbeth) died, again on opening night. A 1942 production saw another dead Duncan and two dead witches; in 1947, Harold Norman died onstage fighting Macduff. Orson Welles' "voodoo" staging of the play in 1936 had no casualties -- perhaps because he hired real Voudun houngans to play the witches. Intriguingly, when another future king-killer, John Wilkes Booth, played Macbeth in 1860, that production also went off without a hitch.

*"The night has been unruly: where we lay,
Our chimneys were blown down; and, as they say,
Lamentings heard i' the air; strange screams of death,
And prophesying with accents terrible
Of dire combustion and confused events
New hatch'd to the woeful time."*

-- William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, II:iii:54-59

King James, at the time of the play's premiere, had in fact just survived another king-killing plot (the fifth major one against him), the infamous Gunpowder Plot of November 5, 1605. One Robert Catesby, in collusion with several other Catholics, rented a vault beneath the House of Lords, and planned to blow up Parliament while the King addressed it. According to official propaganda, the King's suspicions (perhaps exacerbated by the fact that his own father had also been murdered by a gunpowder mine) caused a search for explosives in the area. Guy Fawkes, an engineer, was discovered crouching over the fuse train; the other conspirators, blinded by loose powder, fell to the King's men as well. Words related to the Plot recur throughout the play; the "dire combustion" above, along with Macbeth's hypocritical announcement that murder "hath broke ope the Lord's anointed temple, and stolen hence the life of the building." Other words evoke the Plot; Shakespeare uses "blow" five times in the play, "vault" twice, and "trains" once. Most tellingly, the "equivocator" mentioned in the Porter's soliloquy, in Macbeth's bitter description of the witches after Birnam Wood moves, and in Malcolm and Macduff's "trust trial" refers to the Jesuit Henry Garnet, executed (with two others) as arch-conspirators in the Plot, and the author of *A Treatise of Equivocation*, a Jesuit "spy manual" for operations in England.

*"The weird sisters, hand in hand,
Posters of the sea and land,
Thus do go about, about:
Thrice to thine and thrice to mine
And thrice again, to make up nine.
Peace! the charm's wound up."*

-- William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, I:iii:32-37

Three equivocations, and Garnet's thricefold damnation by the Porter (as "farmer" -- his alias -- "equivocator," and "tailor" -- his role in the Plot), three Jesuits executed. The parallels with the Three Witches (and the Three Murderers that Macbeth sends after Banquo) echo throughout the play; for example, Macbeth sees three apparitions in Hell with the witches during his final visit to them. In Hell, also, the witches are joined by the (triple) goddess Hecate, their patron, who leads a circle dance of demons in a musical number probably written by Shakespeare's sometime collaborator Thomas Middleton. Shakespeare's original magical ritual for this scene, unfortunately, has been lost -- or suppressed. Interestingly enough, King James had been the target of three attempted murders by witchcraft; the Fian plot of 1590, the Bothwell plot of 1593, and the Gowrie plot of 1600. (This had, no doubt, impelled James to compose a scientific manual of witch-detection, the *Daemonologie*.) Each of the plots involved a symbolic drowning, and the first of them (of witches met "in thunder, lightning, or in rain") involved the conjuring of a mighty storm (like the one

in 1703?) to sink the King's ship.

*"To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day
To the last syllable of recorded time,
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death."*

-- William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, V:v:21-25

In fact, the three witches always appear under murky, "infected" skies, heralded by storms and atmospheric anomalies of a most frightening nature. (Just like the "black and dismal" day of the Gunpowder Plot, according to the royal report.) Not for nothing does Macbeth hail them as "secret, black, and midnight hags." Again, in the play three nights descend, each carefully marked out by characters giving the time: the night on which Macbeth first meets the witches and becomes Thane of Cawdor, the night on which Macbeth murders Duncan and becomes King of Scotland, and the night on which he murders Banquo and then sees Banquo's ghost. The days after both murders are dark ("By th'clock tis day, and yet dark night strangles the traveling lamp."), and on each end of the three-day period, Macbeth meets the three witches. In three dark days and three black nights, Shakespeare fixes "night's predominance" in a "shoal of time" where cause and effect separate. Again, he works his [time-twisting twin](#) theme -- "fair is foul and foul is fair," Macduff is fathered and motherless, Lady Macduff is the virtuous twin of Lady Macbeth, the witches "should be women, but your beards" indicate masculinity. Again, the mystical androgyne evokes the [mirror](#) magic that fixes "this pernicious hour" under "seeling Night," cutting Scotland off from the natural world.

*"Here's a knocking indeed! If a man were porter of Hell's gate, he should have old turning the key.
[Knocking within]*

Knock, knock, knock! Who's there, i' the name of Beelzebub?"

-- William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, II:iii:1-3

In his act of regicide, Macbeth has plunged Scotland into Hell in three days of darkness (such as followed the Crucifixion, when Christ spent three days in Hell). The porter at haunted [Glamis Castle](#), Macbeth's bird-infested seat, drunkenly proclaims the gates he guards the gates of Hell, and indeed they enclose a scene of horror, that "tongue nor heart cannot conceive nor name." Macbeth's pact with the demonic has opened the gates to the kingdom of Hecate, the Triple Goddess "o'er the one-half world" where "nature seems dead" and wolves, bears, ravens, and the rest of "Night's black agents" prowl. Macduff explicitly contrasts Macbeth's Hellish Scotland with the "gracious England" under Edward the Confessor where Malcolm hides out; Edward can heal with a touch, while Macbeth's subjects are "dying or e'er they sicken." Powerful imagery, only passed by the royal censors because of their interest in seeing plays that used the Gunpowder Plot theme succeed.

*"Hail, king! for so thou art: behold, where stands
The usurper's cursed head: the time is free:
I see thee compass'd with thy kingdom's pearl,
That speak my salutation in their minds;
Whose voices I desire aloud with mine:
Hail, King of Scotland!"*

-- William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, V:viii:54-59

However, Shakespeare's ties to the Plot itself bear examination. Robert Catesby was born in Warwickshire, just a few miles north of Stratford-on-Avon, and was apparently a habitue of the Mermaid Tavern where he must have known Shakespeare and his colleagues. Shakespeare was even related by marriage to virtually every one of the plotters, and his old patron from the [School of Night](#), Henry Percy, wound up imprisoned in the Tower for his suspected role in the conspiracy. Finally, Shakespeare's daughter Susanna was accused of crypto-Catholic recusancy under the post-Plot law of 1606, although the charges were apparently dropped. Working from his favored spot as one of the King's Men, did Shakespeare, like Macbeth himself, plot the murder of his patron the King of Scotland? Did he lay a magickal train of powder in the lost rituals of *Macbeth*, sacrificing a life (by fever) to achieve death by fire and storm, catching Abraham Lincoln (among others) in the thaumaturgical blast radius? Did the loyal Warwickshireman, angered by the

failure of his mystic master John Dee's [earlier rites](#), intend to cast time back to November and re-light the failed explosion, or to curse James in the here and now, using his own witch-maniacs and Scottish legendry against him?

Either way, the scheme apparently backfired; James ruled for nineteen more years, confounding Shakespeare's Rosicrucian backers by executing Sir Walter [Raleigh](#) and diplomatically sabotaging the Winter King of Bohemia (after Shakespeare's efforts brought him to power through the occult dramaturgy of *[A Winter's Tale](#)*). However, perhaps the play was actually aimed at the third royal present that day in 1606, James' son and heir, the future Charles I, beheaded in 1649 during the witches' sabbat Imbolc. Although the Stuarts straggled back for one more try, the line of Banquo was broken forever in 1688, when a "miraculous storm" blew William of Orange into power. And after that, there were no more executions of witches in England. Flourish, and exeunt.

Season of Mistletoe

I was born in Michigan, which by many Americans is viewed to be the climatic equivalent of the icy afterlife of Norse mythology, yet which is viewed by many Canadians as a balmy winter home. But I grew up in South Florida. One of the interesting things about South Florida is that it has a very large Jewish population. South Florida also has an average age of 181, its citizens kept mobile in a zombie-like shamble through the energies of a powerful curse placed upon it by displaced Native Americans. But the weather is *great*.

But I digress. Anyway, I grew up in an environment where the mix of those who celebrate Christmas and Chanukah was roughly half and half. As a result, even though I was born Catholic, I picked up a *lot* of Jewish lore and custom, both by osmosis and by having lots of Jewish friends.

More importantly, there are many interesting societal effects of such a diverse environment. For example, people in South Florida rarely say "Merry Christmas" to each other, preferring the more nebulous "Happy Holidays!" (I've carried this one step further to the *thirtysomething*-stolen "Happy Merry Pagan Holiday!", ensuring I offend everyone equally.) I was never in a school-sponsored Christmas pageant growing up, and our classes never partook in class projects or craft-y tasks that presumed a Christian upbringing, like making tree ornaments. (We did these things, but there were always Jewish options made available for students as well.) One of our classes got in trouble when we threw an impromptu matzoth party when the teacher was out of town and we were left alone. Our grocery stores had *extensive* food choices, including entire freezer cases devoted to Jewish cuisine. We were diverse.

So when I went to college in Tallahassee, I was shocked to realize that, in fact, not everyone grew up in an environment with several dozen Jewish friends. In fact, many of my new collegiate friends had never even *met* a Jew, nor did they know that *schmaltz* was, in fact, Yiddish for rendered chicken fat. Since there were other Jewish students in our dorm, this led to some awkward situations. ("Why can't we have a floor Christmas party?" "Because not everyone here is *Christian!*" "Oh, come on; it'll be fun! We ordered a spiral-cut ham!") It also led to some actively *angering* moments, like when I met someone who actually believed in a vast Zionist conspiracy.

Anyway, last year I talked about using [holiday clichés](#) in one's games. This year I'll point out that, even if your gaming cultures *do* all share the same holiday, *how* they celebrate that holiday may be completely different. On a small scale, compare traditions among those who celebrate Christmas: When do they open presents, when do they buy the tree, what do they do on Christmas, when do they take down the decorations, and so on. And for those of us in the U.S., just try to find two families that agree on Thanksgiving traditions like whether it's dressing or stuffing, whether cornbread is good in stuffing or (in fact) a Cthulhean evil, whether you mush up the cranberry sauce or leave it whole on a plate for its can-lines to shimmer in the candlelight, and so on. (As an aside, if you ever manage to find a Significant Other whose family traditions for Thanksgiving match your own family's, be careful; you have accidentally slipped into an alternate dimension, and are in fact dating a parallel universe version of yourself . . . which is also the reason why you two agree on pizza toppings.)

But beyond individual anomalies in tradition around the holidays, there are also national differences. Some regions are more religious than others, some countries give different days off, and so on. For a hilarious example, check out David Sedaris' "[Do They Know It's Christmas After All](#)" from the second act of last week's [This American Life](#). In this radio monologue, he points out that the Dutch have unusual beliefs about Christmas, like how they open presents on December 6th, or how they believe Saint Nick was the former Bishop of Turkey who either pretends to kick naughty children or possibly stuff them in sacks and taken them back to Spain.

Or as another example, Boxing Day, celebrated on December 26th in Canada, Great Britain, Australia, and New Zealand, originated with the tradition of the higher classes giving money or utilitarian presents to the lower classes. Today it's celebrated in those countries by not going to work. In contrast, here in the United States we celebrate Boxing Day by going to see the movie *Ali*.

Anyway, to tie it back to gaming, even in worlds where you've gone to the trouble of creating a [calendar](#) complete with believable holidays, it's often too tempting to either limit the game world to one set of holidays, or to presume

that all holidays are celebrated the same. ("That's funny; these desert nomads celebrate First Harvest, too . . .") Even a little variation can help make your game world real . . . especially in a long-running campaign, where the danger exists of having the game world start to feel cyclical and boring. ("Well, it's First Harvest now; that means a big party. Then there's Storeholm; that's where we put up food for the winter . . . our enemies usually try to attack then. ")

And hopefully your gaming holidays and festivals will be as interesting, varied, and joyful as ours in the real world are.

Happy Merry Pagan Holiday!

* * *

As a completely unrelated aside, am I the only one who's horrified by the [Tickle Me Elmo Surprise](#)? For those of you unaware, this item is similar to the Tickle Me Elmo that folks got into knife fights over in toy stores a few years ago, except it's a bit more sophisticated, using TL8 Tickle Technology. Perhaps most interesting, this doll supposedly has a new secret "play mode" that begins on January 9th. So apparently it knows what the date is, and will react accordingly.

At the risk of expressing my bad movie knowledge, isn't this the plot of [Halloween III](#)? I mean, they're telling us up front that something's going to happen, yet we're paying to invite these cuddly little Trojan horses into our homes. What if January 9th rolls around, and they start tittering madly and, in a cheerful high-pitched voice, say, "Elmos form Elmotron! Now you die! Hee-hee-hee-hee-hee . . ." And then the 87,000,000,000 Tickle Me Elmo Surprises in the world merge together in a gargantuan plush clockwork automaton, destroying whole cities with its giggly vibrating mirthful presence?

Wouldn't we be surprised?

If future generations find this missive, know that I tried to warn them.

And if my therapist finds this . . . um . . . know that I'm just kidding.

--Steven Marsh

* * *

Last week's answer: In Nomine 2001 Calendar, back cover.

(Two stars) "Discard *Fair Gold Ring* when tested. If tested, make a roll (or draw a #) to determine which ring card may be immediately played:

- *The One Ring* (11, 12+)
- a *Dwarven Ring* (9, 10, 11, 12+),
- a *Magic Ring* (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6);
- a *Lesser Ring* (any result)."

Murphy's Rules



by John Kovalic

Murphy's Rules



Murphy's Rules



Designer's Notes: GURPS Steam-Tech

by William H. Stoddard

GURPS Steam-Tech was put together from the works of many contributors. In checking their submissions before accepting them for the playtest draft, I noticed several points where the contributors disagreed on how to apply the existing rules -- with each other or with me -- and realized that on some points the implications of the rules weren't fully clear to me. Nowhere did this happen more often than in the creation of clockworks, automata, and analytical engines. By the time the final draft went in, the playtesters and I had made many things clearer. For the benefit of other steampunk GMs and players, or of anyone who uses the *GURPS* rules for computers, here are fuller guidelines for designing such systems.

Complexity and IQ

Complexity is an abstract measure of a computer's information processing power, with higher scores indicating more power. For most computers, IQ is Complexity + 3; for sentient computers, IQ is Complexity + 5. The original Complexity scale started at 1, and thus at IQ 4. *GURPS Steampunk* added lower Complexity scores, down to -2, corresponding to IQ 1, the lowest score possible in *GURPS*, to represent devices simpler than computers, but still possessing some sort of data processing capability and perhaps behavioral response.

Action Sequences

The simplest thing an automatic device can do is carry out a fixed series of movements or actions. A device carrying out one series, such as a clock, is Complexity -2; a device carrying out several coordinated series in a repeating cycle, such as a music box, is Complexity -1; if the device does not precisely repeat, as in an orrery, where several celestial bodies move with different orbital periods, the device is Complexity 0.

Self-Regulation

Another class of very simple devices is automatic control systems, which monitor and compensate for environmental changes. Devices such as a thermostat, which keeps a room at a fixed temperature, or a governor, which keeps a steam engine running at constant speed, are Complexity -1. Autopilots, which keep a vehicle moving in a fixed direction at a fixed speed, are Complexity 0. Note that a vehicle that moves on tracks needs a steering mechanism less sophisticated than an actual autopilot; a course control that can start, stop, and make a sequence of right and left turns at specific points is Complexity -1.

Computation

Complexity scores can be defined for calculating devices. Adding machines are Complexity -2. Four-function calculators are Complexity -1. Calculators with preprogrammed functions, such as scientific calculators, are Complexity 0. Programmable calculators are Complexity 1 or higher.

Codes and Cyphers

Encoding or decoding messages with simple substitution codes is a function much like simple calculation; machines for this purpose are Complexity -1. Such coded messages can be broken without a penalty to Cryptanalysis. More complex encryption schemes require actual programs, discussed below. Breaking any code, even a simple substitution code, also requires an actual program.

Programs

Only a machine of Complexity 1 or higher can be programmed. A procedure counts as a program if it contains branch points, where the machine performs one or another action depending on the internally stored results of previous actions. If there are no branch points, or if the branch depends on something external (such as a human operator throwing a switch, or a thermostat sensing the temperature of a room), the procedure is not a program and usually requires Complexity 0 or less.

Programs carry out a variety of functions; major categories are personality simulation programs, advantage programs, skill programs, and utility programs. See *GURPS Robots* for several examples of each type.

A standard machine can run two programs at its own Complexity.

Languages

A program amounts to a set of instructions. But the form taken by the instructions depends on the complexity of the machine. Complexity 1 machines must be programmed by actually specifying the internal state of the mechanism, using what is called "machine language." The very first computers during World War II were actually programmed by physically rewiring the circuits, and analogous methods involving Mechanic skill can be required in a steampunk setting.

Machines of higher Complexity can be programmed or instructed through "languages" that bear a closer resemblance to actual human languages. The instructions may take the form of alphanumeric punched cards, or lines of text on a screen, or speech, or sign language, depending on the machine's sensors. At Complexity 2, a machine can understand a restricted instruction set -- something like Fortran for a computer, or a set of code phrases for an early mechanical man. At Complexity 4, it can cope with actual human languages.

Personality Simulation

A machine at Complexity 4 can achieve limited personality simulation, which includes a single disadvantage and up to five Quirks. Over time, the machine's lack of depth and of actual human experience will become apparent. A machine at Complexity 5 can achieve full personality simulation with a multilayered personality. Either type of program can be either voluntary (a role the machine is playing) or obligatory; obligatory personality programs are worth character points, but voluntary ones are not. A machine at Complexity 6 has the potentiality for sentience; a sentient machine does not simulate, but actually has a personality.

A simpler option is a pet program, which simulates the behavior of an animal. Pet programs are possible at any Complexity; the maximum IQ a program can simulate is its Complexity + 2. Note that the beginnings of real trainability at IQ 4 correspond to the ability to understand a limited range of spoken commands at Complexity 2. A pet program can include psychological disadvantages corresponding to those of the animal it simulates, such as Hidebound or Incurious.

Skills

A skill program grants a machine a number of points dedicated to a specific skill. Note that points spent on mental skills count x4 because of the machine's Eidetic Memory. The maximum number of points in a skill program depends on Complexity: 1/2 for Complexity 1, 1 for Complexity 2, 2 for Complexity 3, 4 for Complexity 4, 8 for Complexity 5, and 16 for Complexity 6 (counted as 2, 4, 8, 16, 32, or 64 for mental skills).

How does this translate into skill levels? Machine IQ also depends on Complexity. So for a Mental/Average skill such as Cartography, Complexity 1 would allow IQ 4 and 2 points of skill, for Cartography-4; Complexity 2 would allow IQ

5 and 4 points of skill, for Cartography-6; Complexity 3 would allow Cartography-9, Complexity 4 would allow Cartography-14, Complexity 5 would allow Cartography-23, and Complexity 6 would allow Cartography-40.

But someone has to write the program, and it's not possible to write a program above one's own skill. In a realistic campaign, the best person in a given field is probably skill 20 -- skills above 20 are getting into the "best in history" range and their possessors will not be writing programs! So a machine of Complexity 5 or 6 probably should not have skill higher than 20, even if it could run a more complex program. If there are sentient machines in a campaign, they can write their own programs and get up to skill levels no human being can match.

Machines of low Complexity can't have enough skill to be worth much. But a machine can also provide assistance to a human user's skill. Allow +2 to skill at the Complexity where such assistance first becomes possible, and an added +1 for each added level of Complexity.

The Automaton Option

An analytical engine can have the Automaton option, which enables it to control a vehicle, automaton, or mechanical man. The code that does this occupies one of its two program slots and enables it to perceive, communicate, manipulate, and move about.

An automaton has DX as well as IQ. This is equal to half its Complexity (rounded down), plus 8. Thus, a Complexity 4 machine has $DX = 4/2 + 8 = 10$. Physical skills, based on DX, are not enhanced by Eidetic Memory; for a Physical/Average skill such as Boxing, Complexity 1 would allow DX 8 and Boxing-6, Complexity 2 would allow Boxing-8, Complexity 3 would allow Boxing-9, Complexity 4 would allow Boxing-11, Complexity 5 would allow Boxing-12, and Complexity 6 would allow Boxing-14.

In a steampunk setting with mechanical men, "programming" may take place through physical drill in a series of actions, and a "programming language" may be a spoken language with a small number of standard signals. The whole process may look much like the military training of the period.

The Dedicated Option

A machine can have the Dedicated option, meaning that its programs are built into its gears or circuits. This inflexibility makes it cheaper but less flexible. A normal machine has the Rote Learning [-25] disadvantage, enabling it to learn maneuvers but not new skills. A Dedicated machine has Cannot Learn [-30] and cannot even learn maneuvers.

A Dedicated machine can still have more than one program; it simply can't change which ones it is running, or store programs without running them. For example, a Complexity 4 mechanical man with Juggling-12 as a Dedicated program needs one program slot for the skill program, and another for its basic body operation program, so clearly it can run two programs at the same time.

Since machines of complexity 0 or less cannot be programmed, they all have the Dedicated option.

The High-Capacity Option

The High-Capacity option gives a machine three slots at its Complexity, instead of two. If it has the Automaton option, its body operation program occupies one slot, so it has two left, instead of one.

For machines that do not run programs, High-Capacity can be interpreted in other ways. For a music box, for example, it could mean having several different stored melodies that can be played alternatively; for a calculator, it could mean being able to retain a number in memory, over and above the two it was immediately operating on, like a four-function calculator with a Memory key.

With these interpretative rules, it's possible to build automata for a variety of purposes. For example, consider the

control device for the bomb-carrying ornithopter automaton. This needs to direct a series of flapping movements that keep the device flying and also to execute a series of turns and drop bombs at specified points, but it's not able to sense if the wind blows it off course, so it's Complexity -1. At TL(4+1) this is achievable with a Genius small device, a standard miniengine, or a Dumb microframe; since weight is at a premium in a flying machine, make it a Genius small device. In addition, give it the Automaton, Dedicated, and Mechanical options.

Accounting for the effects of these choices gives a device that weighs 15 lbs., occupies 0.3 cf, costs \$5,000, and consumes negligible power. With Complexity -1, it has IQ 2 and DX 7; its flight will probably be somewhat awkward.

To make it a true autopilot, capable of correcting for the wind blowing it off course, it would need Complexity 0. This might just barely be reconciled with the need for low weight by making it a Genius miniengine with the Automaton, Dedicated, Mechanical, and Supercompact options. The result would weigh 60 lbs., occupy 1.2 cf, cost \$105,000, and consume 0.2 kW. Complexity 0 would give it IQ 3 and DX 8. Raising the cost of the ornithopter from \$40,000 to \$140,000 might be justified by increased reliability; an experimental advanced design might be a useful target for foreign spies in a clockpunk setting.

With a little ingenuity, a GM can contrive many other clockworks, calculating engines, and automata to aid, baffle, or tempt players. *GURPS Steam-Tech* offers a number of examples based on these rules.

Pyramid Pick

Hard Vacuum and Hard Vacuum: Science Gone Mad

Published by [Fat Messiah Games](#)

Designed by Darrel Hayhurst

\$14.95 each

"As early as 1930s we processed the knowledge to build a simple space flyer."

--Willy Ley, July 20, 1969

Perhaps Herr Ley may have been exaggerating a little, but the notion of World War II-era space flight certainly tickles the fancy of *Flash Gordon*-style science fiction fans like myself. Just imagine where we would be now if space flight began 20 years earlier than when it actually started in the 1950s. We quite possibly wouldn't still be mucking about in low earth orbit as we are now.

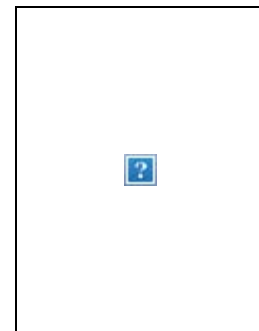
That's the concept behind *Hard Vacuum*, the board game of "pulp sci-fi space combat designed by Darrel Hayhurst and set in a wild alternative WWII." The Germans develop manned space flight by 1941 and pervert the new technology to their war effort. Soon, the Germans started throwing orbital bombers at the Allies who, with the help of Robert Goddard, started building their own primitive space fighters. The Germans discover a new super-fuel that vastly improves their spacecraft, while Nikola Tesla provides the fledgling Americans space force with a new atomic power generator for their ships.

Hard Vacuum operates on modified d6 mechanics; the dice are numbered 0-5 (FMG sells its own set of "Vacuum Dice") and a roll of five allows you to re-roll and add the result. The game is played on a standard hex-grid, although the game includes templates to play on a plain surface. The basic game mainly features fighter-sized ships, although larger ships of destroyer size are more than possible under the game's comprehensive design system. Movement and combat are simultaneous.

Although the *Hard Vacuum* universe is set in the genre of 1940s science fiction, the movement system is by no means unrealistic. Spacecraft in *Hard Vacuum* are strict adherents to Newton's Laws of Motion. A ship will continue travel along the same vector until the ship uses its thrusters to alter course. Just like real space flight, ships can travel in one direction while facing another. To help players plot the ship's movement, players use triangular numbered counters placed along the hex sides to indicate how far and in what direction the vessel is traveling per turn.

The basic rules initially introduce German and American ships, each with their own unique set of rules and tactics. German fighters rely on both a finite supply of ammunition for their projectile weapons and fuel for their engines. Americans draw the power for maneuvering and their energy-based weapons from their Tesla Zero-Point Energy coils, which are drained and recharged over the course of the turn. German space planes tend to have greater lateral (sideways) thrust than their American counterparts who have greater rear thrust.

Combat in *Hard Vacuum* is fast and decisive. To hit the target, you must beat its silhouette rating; the number of dice you roll depends on the weapon and the range to the target. Any result that produces doubles requires making a roll on the critical hits table, causing everything from damage to a vital ship system to the sudden destruction of the target. Advanced rules add the concept of visibility (you have to see the target amid the inky blackness of space before you can shoot at it) and deflection (the target's speed and vector, as well as the attacker's, are taken into account in combat) to the game, increasing the overall "realism" of the system.



Hard Vacuum contains 10 different spacecraft ranging from light fighters to freighters to the massive Von Braun class space destroyer. The main book features nine basic scenarios to test your skill and tactical knowledge. The book has a full set of cutout counters (which contains hundreds of thrust makers that are a pain to cut out) and a pull out set of quick start rules so players can dive right in.

Fat Messiah Games has just released their first ***Hard Vacuum*** supplement, ***Hard Vacuum: Science Gone Mad***, which greatly expands upon the game and brings new forces into the "Battle for Orbit."

In the basic rules, ***Hard Vacuum*** only features "generic" pilots. ***Science Gone Mad*** adds rules for Aces whose prowess in combat allows them to improve their ship's maneuverability, increase their chances to hit their target, escape their doomed spacecraft, and other useful skills. There is also a set of pilot campaign rules that allow new pilots to gain skills as they grow in experience.

Science Gone Mad also features a "Flashback 1942" section that contains rules for early-war orbital bombers and fighters. Early-war ships use liquid fuel rockets rather than the super-science engines used by their advanced counterparts. As the ship uses its hazardous brew of nitric acid and alcohol, it actually loses mass, making the craft more maneuverable. The British, whose ships are introduced in ***Science Gone Mad***, primarily use these primitive drive systems in its growing space fleet.

New super-science technologies featured in ***Science Gone Mad*** include radio-guided torpedoes, magnetic beams, and stealth hulls. More mundane equipment like hanger bays, fuel and ammo dumps, and gimbaled thrusters are also available. ***Science Gone Mad*** also includes an expanded ship design rules that allows players to add space stations, and imposing battle cruisers to their fleets. Like its predecessor, ***Science Gone Mad*** also includes a full set of cutout counters, 11 new scenarios, and 17 new ship and space station designs.

The one conflict that has plagued game designers, particularly those who design space combat games, is realism vs. playability. Some games bore their players down with complex rules designed to emphasize tactical richness, while those who take the idea of "Keep It Simple, Stupid" to an extreme can sap a game of any real depth. ***Hard Vacuum*** succeeds as one of those few space combat games that strikes a balance between these extremes. The movement system is designed so as to reduce the tricky proposition of space travel down to an easy to understand level. At the same time, you don't need to be a rocket scientist (no pun intended) to understand the combat mechanics.

Most of the game's artwork is CGI, created by Darrel Hayhurst himself. Although the space ship renderings look slightly amateurish in the first book, they greatly improve in ***Science Gone Mad***. Either way, they do capture the *Buck Rogers* essence of the game's background. The layout in both books are quite good; the rules are outlined in a logical order, the ship record sheets are eye catching, and illustrated play examples are clear and concise.

One thing this game system definitely needs is a miniature line. The range of ship designs is awesome and deserves to be rendered into pewter reality. Also, the lack of a miniature line may deter some from trying the game out. Although the counters provided with the game are excellent, hard-core miniature gamers usually turn their noses up at any two-dimensional playing piece.

With a great rules system and a background that will send shivers down the spine of any alternate history lover, ***Hard Vacuum*** is just the game for those looking for something different in a space combat game. Add on ***Science Gone Mad***, and you'll have a game that will keep you and your gaming group occupied for quite some time.

So power up your reactor, and charge your atomic bolt cannons! It's time to make Jerry suck some vacuum!

--Mark A. Siefert

Dork Tower!



Dork Tower!



Circle Of Fear -- Part I

A GURPS Atomic Horror Adventure

by Stephen Dedman

For this adventure, the GM will need the *GURPS Basic Set*, *GURPS Compendium I* and *II*, and *GURPS Atomic Horror* (*GURPS Bestiary* and *GURPS Russia* may also be useful, but are not essential). It is designed for 100-point *Atomic Horror* characters and set in the mid-1950s, but can easily be adapted to any setting where close encounters with UFOs might be expected, such as *GURPS Black Ops*, *GURPS Supers*, or *GURPS Illuminati*.

At least one PC should be a US-based member of a group such as the Theoretical Science Foundation; others may be allied scientists, journalists, feds, or other people caught up in the hunt for the UFO.

(For the sake of convenience, this adventure is set this late in 1954 -- the year of *This Island Earth* and *Monster from the Ocean Floor*, the H-bomb test at Bikini Atoll, Kruschev's visit to China, and McCarthy's condemnation by the Senate -- but it can be moved to any other year without difficulty.)

First Contact

The first indication of anything strange is a sudden rash of UFO sightings and similar reports -- including crop circles and a rain of fish.

Most people would ignore the first few reports -- except for TSF members, and the tabloid journalists who will compete to bring these stories to the world. After that happens, of course, many of the "sightings" will be fakes, and investigators will have to work a little harder to sort the truth from the garbage. The number given after each report is the modifier to Research skill that a PC will have to make to hear of this incident within 24 hours of its happening: halve this penalty if an attempt at Research is made later.

- **Tuesday 28 September:** UFO seen by crew of Japanese fishing vessel near Kushiro (-10).
- **Tuesday 28:** UFO seen over Melbourne, Australia (-7).
- **Thursday 30:** UFO photographed outside Sydney, Australia (-2).
- **Monday 4 October:** UFO seen over Auckland, New Zealand (-10).
- **Early morning, Wednesday 6:** Rain of fish near Adrar, Algeria (-3).
- **Morning, Monday 11:** Crop circle found in garden north of Helsinki, Finland (-4).
- **Tuesday 12:** UFO seen, photographed and filmed by tourists over Cairo (+3).

Even the least alert UFO researcher should realise that something is going on when the first photographs of a UFO behind the Great Pyramid hit the newspapers. Rolls on Photography/TL7 and Research skills will reveal that the more spectacular photos, those which feature Pyramids or the Sphinx, are faked, while the less clear photos which show a saucer with less glamorous backdrops (slums in the cemetery, sand dunes, roofs topped with TV antennae) may be authentic. Unfortunately, judging the scale when there's almost nothing but desert and/or sky to go by is impossible. The grainy 8mm film of the UFO streaking through the sky, is also almost useless, simply because there wasn't enough light for a clear image, and the hand-held camera shakes too much for a good idea of the speed at which the object seems to be moving.

The photos are clear enough to reveal one thing, though: the saucer looks identical to the one photographed near Sydney, Australia (Research at -1). This isn't particularly significant in itself -- it's the same basic dome-on-a-disc shape commonly reported since *The Day the Earth Stood Still* was released -- but it matches the descriptions of the UFOs over Melbourne, Auckland, and Japan (Research -3). PCs reading the reports and making a roll on IQ -2 will also notice one unusual detail most of the accounts have in common: the saucer is reported as appearing and

disappearing suddenly -- "like a soap bubble", in the words of one witness.

Go Fish

Given travel times and costs of the 1950s, it's unlikely that even the best-funded US-based researcher would be able to travel to all of the places where this saucer has been seen, so some other method of gathering data will have to be used. A member of the TSF should be able to enlist help from the London office, and possibly from field officers near these sites: a good or better reaction roll, or a successful roll on Administration skill, should be enough to persuade the TSF to send someone out to perform interviews, take photos, etc.

PCs who are not members of the TSF who want to conduct research independently will have to rely on their own Contacts in the area (Academic or Journalist contacts would be most useful, but the military may be conducting its own investigations), or hope that Research skill will answer their questions (a modifier of at least -5 in most cases).

If the players don't think of the right questions to ask, the PCs should be able to do so if they roll on Science! or the appropriate scientific skill (listed for each question). Make a Reaction roll to determine the quality of the answer.

Q: Are the reports reliable? (*Psychology +2: roll for each incident*)

A: (*Poor or worse roll*) No reliable witnesses found. (*Neutral*) One fairly reliable witness found, but no collaboration. (*Good or better*) 1d+1 reliable witnesses found, and stories check out except for minor details.

Q: At what time did the sightings occur, and how long did they last? (*Astronomy +2: roll for each sighting*)

A: (*Poor or worse roll*) Uncertain. (*Neutral*) Time known to nearest hour; duration uncertain. (*Good or better*) Time known to nearest 10 minutes, duration (Kushiro, 7.50 am; about 20 seconds; Melbourne, 5.30 pm, about 10 seconds; Sydney, 6 am, about 20 seconds; Cairo, 8.20 pm, about 30 seconds)

Q: In what direction was the object traveling? (*Astronomy -1: roll for each sighting*)

A: (*Neutral or worse roll*) Uncertain. (*Good or better roll*) From north to south; uncertain as to speed.

Q: What sort of fish were discovered in Adrar? (*Zoology -2*)

A: (*Poor or worse roll*) No evidence found. (*Neutral*) A variety of sizes and flavors, all unfamiliar to the locals. (*Good*) Salt-water fish, primarily cod. (*Very Good or better*) Primarily North Sea cod and others from same habitat.

Q: Describe the Helsinki crop circle. (*Botany -1 or Geology -3*)

A: (*Neutral or worse roll*) Simple circle in a garden, about 5 yards diameter and a foot deep, already filling with muddy water from recent rain and may be faked. (*Good or better*) 5 yards 7.21 inches diameter, approximately 13 inches deep; apparently perfectly round with a flat base, no sign of a hole in center to suggest use of stake and rope. Surrounding plants undisturbed; flowers, including most of root structure, missing. Radiation level normal.

Nothing much will happen for another week, leaving the PCs to puzzle over these results. Before they can renew their passports and book airline tickets, however, the first reported sightings of a similar object start coming in from California.

Wave Theory

The first report comes from LA, where three passengers on a flight from Hawaii claim to have seen a UFO through the

window of their plane (a Lockheed Super Constellation) just as the sun was rising: some time between 5 and 6 am, on Tuesday 18. While the aircrew report seeing nothing, and dismiss it as a sighting of Venus or a patch of ice crystals, the PCs may consider this worth investigating.

The three passengers -- Linda Jameson, 9 years old; her mother, Barbara, a grade school teacher; and Robert Smith, a machinist on an aircraft production line -- were all seated on the starboard side of the plane. Smith, who also served as an airframe fitter in the Korean War and World War II, is quite sure what he saw, though he will protest vehemently that he doesn't believe in "little green men." He saw a disc, the approximate color of aluminum and without any identifiable markings or lights, that flew beneath their plane for about 12 seconds before disappearing under a cloud. He estimates that its altitude was somewhere between 15,000' and 20,000', that it was between 20' and 50' in diameter, and that it was moving northwards at least as fast as the Super Constellation was headed east. If shown the pictures from Sydney or Cairo (which he hasn't seen before -- he was too busy vacationing to read a paper), Smith will say cautiously that since he saw his from a different angle, he can't be sure it was the same disc, but it looks similar. He suspects it's just an experimental plane -- and hopes that it's an American one.

Linda and Barbara will tell similar stories, but with less detail and more diversions (Linda, especially, would rather talk about her holiday in Hawaii, the new dolls and clothes her mother bought her there, etc. Be as cute as possible.)

None of the other passengers will admit to seeing anything, claiming they were asleep at the time or on the wrong side of the plane, and all but one are telling the truth -- Jack Howe, a lawyer who doesn't want to risk being ridiculed. If the PCs manage question him, he will be able to confirm most of the details of Smith's story, but not to add anything important.

Further reports will come in from LA, and further north, over the rest of the day. The vast majority are either errors or hoaxes, but they can be used to make things a little more challenging for the PCs, and give the GM a chance to do a little acting.

Juan Vasquez is a janitor on the Santa Monica pier, who also saw the saucer, but hasn't told anyone: the PCs will only encounter him if they return to the pier between 5.30 am and 7.30 am any day. While a reliable witness, he speaks almost no English, only Spanish.

Roger "Rocky" Shaw claims to have seen the saucer while surfing that morning. An athlete turned B-movie actor and stuntman, Rocky is trying to convince a producer to let him star in *Monster of Malibu*, and sees the saucer sightings as a way of promoting himself. His version of events is copied from the newspaper stories, and agrees with Smith's in most details, except that the saucer was heading due south. Fortunately, he's not a very good liar.

David Goldberg, a beatnik arts student in Portland, Oregon, thinks he saw a saucer almost exactly overhead at about 7 am, when he was walking home from a party. While he saw it too briefly to give a clear description, he is sure that it was headed north. He has not reported it, but one of his professors overheard him talking about it, and informed the TSF. Despite his obvious eccentricities and his hungover condition at the time, David is a reliable witness: his distrust of authority figures, however, will make it difficult to interview him.

Many other people across the USA will be watching the skies at this time, and will report anything that might be a flying saucer. A successful roll on Detect Lies will reveal that they believe their stories, but successful rolls on Meteorology, Astronomy, or Science!, will enable investigators to eliminate any false leads. This will be an excellent opportunity for the PCs to meet some Personalities who were in LA at the time -- including Robert Heinlein, Ray Bradbury, James Dean, Marilyn Monroe, Orson Welles, Ronald Reagan, Roger Corman, Ed Wood, etc.

There will be even more people watching the skies the next day, when the *Midnight Sun* newspaper offers a reward of up to \$5000 for incontrovertible proof that aliens are visiting Earth. Under the circumstances, the PCs could be forgiven for missing authentic sighting reports coming from Anaheim CA, and Dayton WA, on the night of the 19th, and from Phoenix AZ, Ogden UT, Fairfield MT, and Fort McMurray, Canada, early on the morning of the 21st (roll on Research -3 for each sighting). If they do investigate these reports and can verify them (using Interrogation, Detect Lies or Psychology, Astronomy, Meteorology, etc.), they may begin to detect a pattern amid the noise. If not, an NPC will reveal it to them soon.

One person interviewed by the Midnight Sun and other news media on the 19th is Dr.Homer Evans, a blacklisted mathematics professor well known to UFO investigators for his often-stated opinion that aliens must be friendly, to state and federal government and academia for his requests to build structures signalling our presence to aliens, and to B-movie producers for his blistering critiques of many science fiction films. Every time the PCs attempt to interview somebody who has reported seeing a UFO, or visit a site where the saucer has been sighted, roll 1d; on a 1, they will also encounter Evans and/or his cultists.

Some of the fuss will have died down by Saturday 22nd, when a PC (a journalist, scientist or member of the TSF) receives a letter from Evans. Evans claims that the sightings are following a distinct pattern, and that the sealed envelope enclosed with the letter contains a prediction for where it will be sighted before Monday 24th, with a request not to reveal this information before the appropriate time. If the PCs open the envelope, they will find a small piece of paper with one typed line -- "Bombay India, Sunday October 23rd PM, heading south."

If the PCs attempt to question Evans before this time, he will say nothing except that he is waiting for his hypothesis to be validated. Sure enough, there are reports from Bombay the next day, of hundreds of people claiming to have seen a disc in the sky, traveling south, for a few seconds shortly after noon.

Evans will only reveal his formula if the TSF (or whatever other body the PCs are connected to) will promise to support his plans to build geometrical structures that will reveal to anything orbiting the Earth that the planet is inhabited by intelligent beings -- his favorite scheme is for an equilateral triangle of green plants, miles on a side, surrounded by squares of yellow grain, to demonstrate our awareness of Pythagorean theorem. If the TSF does not manage to convince him (very good or better reaction roll), he will tell them to work it out themselves. Fortunately, even if the PCs can't do it, the TSF's best mathematician, Dr.Schelfhout, will come up with an answer on Monday 24th, after reports come in of sightings in Dodge City KS and Brandon, Canada, and a crop circle found a few miles east of Lenora, Nebraska. The saucer is orbiting the globe approximately every day and a half, and coming east by almost exactly six degrees each time.

Fields of Fire

To confirm or disprove this theory, the TSF sends the PCs to Lenora to investigate the crop circle. Finding the circle won't be difficult: the farmer who owns the field, Peter Hoffman, has put signs up on the nearest road, charging \$2 to see it, and his 17-year-old daughter Ellie will be waiting to collect the money. Fortunately, the PCs should arrive before tourists have done much to damage it, though Hoffman's own prints and others are plentiful around it. If they ask Hoffman who has been there before them, he will mention his family, the local veterinarian (an old friend), a few of his children's friends on their way to school, and four city slickers who got out of a black Oldsmobile and took a lot of photographs and left about ten minutes before the PCs arrived.

The circle, less than a hundred yards from the farmhouse, matches almost exactly the description of the one discovered in Helsinki: 5 yards 7.21 inches diameter, approximately 13 inches deep; apparently perfectly round with a flat base, no sign of a hole in center to suggest use of stake and rope. Surrounding plants undisturbed; corn, including most of root structure, missing. Radiation level normal.

Hoffman admits to not having seen the saucer, though he did hear one of his hounds, probably Brutus, barking early in the morning. If the PCs ask to see Brutus, Hoffman will admit that he hasn't been able to find him. If a PC makes a Tracking roll at -6, he will find large pawprints (mostly obscured by later human prints) leading into the circle . . . and none leading out.

Hoffman will leave the PCs at the circle, saying he has chores to do. After about fifteen minutes of investigating the circle, the PCs should roll (smell -5 or Danger Sense) to smell smoke, (roll once per minute, reducing the penalty by 1 every minute). The "city slickers," Evans's cultists, having found a "saucer nest," are trying to carry out one of their mentor's pet schemes -- setting a huge triangular fire to signal the UFO. Unfortunately, they know little about cornfields or setting fires, and this one has gotten away from them.

The sooner the PCs smell the smoke, the easier it will be for them to get away unharmed -- though PCs with an Obsession for "finding out the truth" will have to make Will Rolls to leave the site before finishing their research. Finding a safe route back to their car will require a roll on Meteorology or default (+3 for Absolute Direction, -1 for every minute since the fire started), and considerable haste. If they make their roll to find a safe route out, they will have to cross 6 hexes of fire (see p. B130) minus the slowest PC's Move. If they failed, add 1d to the number of hexes of fire they have to cross. The flames will be too fierce to extinguish without appropriate equipment, but PCs should be encouraged to improvise (if someone's thought to bring a canteen of water, for example, a wet jacket might be used to beat out a hex of fire). They will also have to contend with smoke (see p. B132).

After escaping from the fire, and if not too badly burned, the PCs may decide to stay and help Farmer Hoffman put the fire out, gaining themselves a +2 reputation with the locals (and possibly redeeming themselves with Hoffman if one of the PCs has made a pass at Ellie); if they are uninjured and leave immediately, the TSF will gain a -2 reaction throughout the state.

Making a case against Evans's cultists will be difficult: they disappeared as soon as they realized they'd lost control of the fire, and nobody took a note of their car's registration (though the colors suggest that it came from Colorado). Hoffman's description of them as "four men in black suits and sunglasses, a tad shorter than me and kinda scrawny" and "city folk who looked like they'd been driving all night" isn't much help.

Sssss

The TSF will send the PCs out again as soon as they have recovered from any injuries received in the fire -- to Texarkana on Tuesday night, to Milwaukee on Thursday morning, and to Augusta GA on Friday evening. Each excursion will be an exercise in frustration, as the UFO is never sighted over those cities (though another TSF team does photograph it near Spartanburg while the PCs are in Augusta).

On Sunday morning, the PCs are called to Washington D.C. as part of a briefing for the President, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and other government and military figures. This will give them a chance for encounters with East Coast personalities -- Einstein, Eisenhower, Vice President Nixon, J. Edgar Hoover, and others). A few minutes after 10 am, they receive a message reporting a sighting approximately 50 miles east, near Cambridge MD -- and a report of fish found on a roadside. The press already has most of the details, so the USAF provides helicopters (two Bell Model 47s) to get at least some of the PCs there ahead of anyone else.

Once the PCs find the site (about half an hour later), it will only take Zoology +2 to recognize at least one species of fish dumped there -- piranha. A roll on Zoology at -2 will help them confirm that the rest are also native to the Amazon river. The fish are scattered along approximately 30' of roadway; the mud beside the road is still wet, as are some of the trees, and there is dark mud spattered over some leaves and branches. A good vision roll will enable a PC to spot a small but very colorful frog, which Zoology -2 will identify as an arrow-poison frog. A roll on Tracking will also reveal that a very large snake seems to have slithered into the woods recently.

Finding the snake -- a large, rather hungry and very aggressive anaconda -- will not be difficult, as it will attack the smallest PC to come within 10 yards. Anyone seeing it attack will have to make Fright Checks at -2: -4 for characters with a phobia of reptiles, -8 for anyone with a severe phobia.

Catching the anaconda alive (as requested by the TSF) will be another matter, particularly as no-one has thought to bring a tranquilizer gun or even a net and the helicopter will have to be sent back to the Zoo to collect them. The only useful item in the helicopter (apart from anything the PCs may have brought with them) is a 50 yard coil of rope.

Anaconda

ST 24; DX 13; IQ 3; HT 15/24. (See Python, p. B143.)

Catching a frog will be safer, but frustrating; their bright colors make good camouflage amid the fallen leaves (-2 to

Vision rolls), and catching one requires a contest of DX (the frogs have DX 14).

Once the site and the snake have been examined by the TSF and other scientists, it will be agreed that snake, fish, frogs, mud and water seem to still have been in Amazonia less than an hour before they were found. There is no sign that they were interfered with in any other way.

Riders to the Stars

The TSF's last best hope of learning more about the flying saucer comes on the night of Monday 30th and morning of Sunday 31st; they place as many observers as they can along the projected route through Maine and Quebec, as well as sending a small team to Ulan Bator in Mongolia. The PCs are stationed a few miles west of Auburn, ME. Unknown to them, though, Evans's cultists are also waiting nearby.

At 11.04 pm, the PCs will see lights in the sky, about half a mile away: roll on IQ to recognize as signal flares. More flares light up the sky around them in the next few minutes, some nearer, some further away, as the cultists attempt to attract the attention of the saucer. Before the PCs can pinpoint the cultists and confront them, however, the saucer appears almost directly above the road a few hundred yards away.

The TSF has provided the PCs with a Willys-Overland jeep with a portable searchlight, a movie camera, a Geiger counter, two radiation suits, a tape recorder, a simple first aid kit, and a Colt M1911 pistol: any other equipment they want, they will have to provide themselves. Whether they all pile into the jeep to chase the saucer, or stand around it awestruck, the saucer will pass directly above them and "beam them up" (much to the irritation of the cultists, who were hoping to be "taken home").

The PCs will barely have long enough for a fright check at -3 before being placed in stasis.

Flying Saucers have Landed!

When the PCs regain consciousness, they will be unaware of how much time has passed or exactly where they are. What is immediately obvious will be trapped in a cylinder (15' diameter, 15' high) of some very tough and elastic transparent material -- one of six in a cylindrical room.

- **Cylinder 1:** Contains the PCs and most of the jeep. While the PCs have all arrived intact with most of their equipment, a vital part of the jeep was clipped off by the teleporter -- the front of the engine, the outside inch of the wheels on one side, a corner of the fuel tank, or something else that will render it useless as a jeep. Environment (air, temperature, gravity, etc.) are normal for Maine on an October night.
- **Cylinder 2:** A faulty cylinder that occasionally dumps its loads prematurely -- hence the rains of fish, frogs, etc. Contains seawater and various fish from the Caribbean (Zoology -2 to identify.)
- **Cylinder 3:** Contains a section of Brazilian rainforest, including two small New World monkeys, a well-fed male ocelot, and other assorted small animals (including birds, some small reptiles, and some impressive insects). The ocelot will avoid the PCs if possible, but fight if cornered.

Ocelot

ST 6; DX 14; IQ 4; HT 14/8.

Move/Dodge 10/7; Size 1 (4' long); PD/DR 1/1; Weight 30 lbs; Damage 1d-3 cut; Reach C.

- **Cylinder 4:** Another faulty cylinder; this one won't release its load at all. Contains beautifully iridescent alien jungle plants and various small animals, including flying lizards, arboreal octopus-like creatures, and so on. Unfortunately, the atmosphere inside is poisonous; if the cylinder is breached, it will contaminate the air in the rest of the room (treat as Flourine, pCII136).
- **Cylinder 5:** Another cylinder that won't release its load. Contains snow, soil, very cold moist air, and two Tuskers (see Cast, below).

- **Cylinder 6:** Contains three placid (if rather confused) sheep from the Falkland Islands and some unappetizing grass.

The exterior hull is made of a regenerating metal with DR 30; nothing the PCs are carrying will be able to scratch it, much less penetrate. In the center of the room is a control column that resembles a double helix of semi-precious stones (actually holographs) enclosed in another transparent cylinder (see below for controls and effects).

The cylinders are made of a highly resilient membrane, impervious to crushing damage or energy attacks: hammering at them will do nothing, and bullets fired into them will ricochet directly back at the firer (roll Dodge to avoid being hit, and keep Dodging until the bullet hits something other than the cylinder walls, floor or ceiling -- the jeep's jerry can of water, an Unlucky PC, etc.). A flamethrower will only raise the temperature in the cylinder and fill it with smoke for 2d+1 turns until the life support system brings conditions back to normal. Against cutting/impaling damage, the membrane has only DR 2. It will heal 1 point of cutting or impaling damage per turn, but if the PCs have brought any knives, they should be able to cut their way out: 6 points of damage will make a hole big enough for most characters to crawl through (9 points for Fat or Gigantism, 12 points for Very Fat; each PC should roll DX to get out in one turn, or risk having the membrane seal tight around them and trap them).

If the PCs don't think of cutting their way out, the ocelot will start scratching at the inside of the cylinder. It will be unable to make a large enough hole to escape through, but it will pierce the membrane occasionally. If this doesn't inspire the PCs to start hacking at the membrane, it will inspire the Tuskers, who will slash their way through with their daggers and axes. Fortunately for both the Tuskers and the PCs, the air in the large room, while cold (40 degrees), is breathable (matching that outside the ship, though they won't know that yet).

If the PCs don't have any blades large enough to get them out of the cylinders (the blades in the first aid kit do only Sw -3), they'll have to try to persuade the Tuskers to let them out. This will require good Gesture rolls, as the cylinders are also completely impervious to sound.

X the Unknown

The flying saucer the PCs are in is approximately five million years old, completely automatic, and malfunctioning badly. It is the scoutship for a mothership parked high above the south pole, which travels around the galaxy at near-light speeds collecting lifeforms for study. The mothership had been pre-programmed to return to its homeworld two hundred cycles later -- but when it arrived, the world was a radioactive cinder. After a few months of searching and a moment's thought, the mothership decided to continue with its assigned task until it reestablished contact with its creators.

The mothership is still in remarkably good shape, and crammed with biological specimens, but the scoutship has been exposed to too many corrosive atmospheres and high gravities. Many of its sensors no longer function, so it is effectively blind when it activates its cloaking device, and has to become visible periodically to look for lifeforms. After the PCs were beamed aboard, the scoutship flew over the north pole and was headed south over Russian when it collided with a Russian plane over Lake Baikal; when the stasis fields failed and the PCs found themselves in the cylinder, the scoutship was hastily trying to repair itself but already sinking.

Another thing the PCs don't know: while the saucer's creators were small hive intelligences living on a desert world with no animals bigger than a pig, some of their more imaginative scientists had predicted that larger animals might exist somewhere, and designed the scoutship so that it could shrink samples for easier collection and storage. The PCs, and the other creatures in the scoutship, have been shrunk down to approximately 1/60 their normal height.

Unknown World

While the last PC is escaping from the cylinder, two more systems will fail simultaneously -- the artificial gravity, and the lights. The floor will suddenly develop a 15 degree slope that increases by 1d+1 degrees per minute. PCs will have to roll vs DX not to fall over. The control pillar will provide enough light for people with Night Vision (or Infravision)

to see normally, but everyone else will be at -7 to any tasks that require vision.

It shouldn't take long for the PCs to realize that there's no easy way out of the room; their only hope is to try to operate the controls at random, and there aren't even any buttons to press, though some of the lights have begun to flash. Talking to the pillar doesn't work (it has no sense of hearing), nor does thinking at it (it can't telereceive, either). It does, however, produce a subliminal telepathic signal that characters with Empathy, Danger Sense or Telereceive skill should be able to detect, and which will warn them of any potential disasters before they happen.

The helix is an optical computer memory and sensor array -- in effect, part of the ship's central nervous system. If the PCs (or one of the Tuskers) disrupt its workings -- e.g. by bending it out of shape temporarily, or by slicing through the membrane and placing an opaque object (such as a knife blade) between two lights of different colors, roll on the table below. After 4 effects, PCs with Intuition should be permitted to make an IQ roll to find the right light to reflect, diffract or block to open an escape route; Mathematics will also work, at -10.

Computer hacking effects (roll 3d)

- | | |
|-------------|--|
| 3 | All Cylinders jettison contents. |
| 4 | Cylinder A jettisons contents. |
| 5 | Bright flash of light: PCs must roll HT-2 or be blinded for 1d minutes. |
| 6 | Cylinder H jettisons contents. |
| 7 | Temperature in chamber raised/lowered by 5d degrees. |
| 8 | Cylinder B jettisons contents. |
| 9-12 | No effect. |
| 13 | Artificial gravity restored -- but to 1d-1 G (min. 0; see p. CII141). |
| 14 | Cylinder C jettisons contents. |
| 15 | Stasis restored/switched off in randomly chosen cylinder. |
| 16 | Cylinder G jettisons contents. |
| 17 | Life support system opened/closed to outside world, flooding room with cold water in 12 minutes without providing an avenue of escape. |
| 18 | Cylinder F jettisons contents. |

If a cylinder jettisons its contents, anything inside it will be teleported outside, leaving the cylinder empty (literally -- filled with hard vacuum, unless the membrane is still open). If the PCs get a "jettison" result for the same cylinder twice, the cylinder will fill with water and fish from the lake. This teleportation device is the PCs only hope of escape from the saucer.

After being jettisoned from the cylinders, the PCs will find themselves in cold (but not frozen) water, surrounded by apparently gigantic fish.

To be continued . . .

Cast

Dr. Homer Evans

Late 40s; unruly silver hair and beard, green eyes; 5'9", 130 lbs.

ST 9; DX 10; IQ 14; HT 9. Move 4.75

Advantages: Charisma +1; Intuition; Mathematical Ability; Versatile.

Disadvantages: Bad Temper; Pacifist (Cannot Kill); Poverty (Struggling); Reputation (suspected communist sympathizer; -2 to most Americans, recognized on 10 or less); Secret (writes science fiction under pseudonyms, -5 points); Stubbornness.

Quirks: Incompetence (Diplomacy).

Skills: Astronomy/TL7-15; Computer Programming/TL7-13; Computer Operation/TL7-14; Ecology/TL7-13; Electronics/TL7 (Computers)-16; History-13; Languages (English)-14, (Gaelic)-13, (Greek)-12, (Latin)-12; Mathematics/TL7-16; Physics/TL7-14; Research-14; Science!-13; Writing-13.

Dr.Homer Evans is a firm believer in UFOs as alien spacecraft, who maintains that establishing contact with friendly extraterrestrials is humanity's best hope of avoiding nuclear annihilation. This has not endeared him to the more conservative establishment, and cost him his position as a lecturer at a small private college, but it has gained him a cult following.

Evans is not gullible, deluded or fanatical, though he sometimes comes close where UFO sightings are concerned. He ekes out a meager living writing science fiction and science articles under different pseudonyms. He has no contact with his cult, and rarely approves of their actions.

Evans cultists

ST 9; DX 10; IQ 10; HT 10. Move 5

Advantages: Ally Group (fellow cultists, appear on 9 or less).

Disadvantages: Delusion, Major (they are the elite, and UFOs are coming to save them); Fanaticism; Stubbornness.

Skills: Area Knowledge (California)-10; Astronomy/TL7-9; Driving-10; Fast-Talk-9; Gesture-9; Guns/TL7-10; Research-10; Stealth-9; other skills as needed.

Gear (per group of four): Flare pistol; Geiger counter; Binoculars; Heavy Flashlight; Camera; Tape Recorder; '51 Oldsmobile 88. Usually wear black suits, shoes, hats and sunglasses.

Evans's cultists are more of a nuisance than a menace: they rarely carry weapons, and many of them have the Pacifism (Self-Defence Only) or Combat Paralysis disadvantages. A few, however, may be more formidable, with Wealth and/or High Status, military experience (with appropriate combat skills and weapons), or Legal Enforcement Powers. The cult is worth -20 points as an enemy (medium-sized group).

Ellie Hoffman

Late teens; tanned complexion, strawberry blond hair, blue eyes; 5'5", 105 lbs.

ST 11; DX 9; IQ 9; HT 12. Move 5

Advantages: Attractive; Voice.

Disadvantages: Distractible; Gullibility; Laziness; Lecherousness.

Skills: Agronomy/TL7-10; Animal Handling-9; Area Knowledge (Lenora)-9; Brawling-10; Driving (Car)-8; Guns/TL7 (Shotgun)-10; Merchant-9; Sex-Appeal-13; Stealth-10.

Gear: Jeans; checked shirt; boots.

18 year old Ellie is Hoffman's only daughter, but her desire to leave the farm and see the big city (any big city) is as intense as her father's determination to keep her "safe." Any PC who seduces or is seduced by her is likely to be attacked by Hoffman: depending on how far the seduction progressed, Hoffman might rely on his fists, a whip, a pitchfork, or a shotgun.

Peter Hoffman

Mid 40s; weatherbeaten complexion, greying blond hair, blue eyes; 5'9", 160 lbs.

ST 12; DX 10; IQ 10; HT 12. Move 5

Advantages: High Pain Threshold; Strong Will +2; Toughness (DR 1).

Disadvantages: Bad Temper; Dependent (Ellie, daughter, appears on 15 or less); Intolerance (City folk); Stubbornness; Wealth (Struggling).

Skills: Agronomy/TL6-11; Animal Handling-10; Area Knowledge (Lenora)-9; Brawling-10; Driving (Car, Tractor, Truck)-11; First Aid/TL6-9; Guns/TL6 (Shotgun)-14, (Rifle)-12; Merchant-11; Meteorology/TL6-9; Spear (Pitchfork)-10; Whip-11.

Gear: Ithaca 10ga Shotgun; Pitchfork (each tine does 1d-2 imp; roll for all four); Bullwhip (6 yds); Dungarees; checked shirt; straw hat; boots.

Peter Hoffman is a farmer, a widower, and a protective father. He left school at twelve, has never travelled more than fifty miles from his family farm, and distrusts new ideas and inventions, but he's not as stupid as he likes to pretend.

"Rocky" Shaw

Mid 20s; tanned complexion, golden blond hair, dark blue eyes; 6', 165 lbs.

ST 13; DX 12; IQ 10; HT 13. Move 6

Advantages: Attractive; Charisma +1.

Disadvantages: Compulsive Carousing; Glory Hound; Lecherousness.

Skills: Acting-9; Bard-10; Brawling-12; Carousing-14; Driving (Car)-12; Fast-Talk-8; Motorcycle-13; Performance-10; Sex-Appeal-14; Scuba-11; Surfing-14; Swimming-13.

Roger "Rocky" Shaw is a pro surfer turned B-movie actor and stuntman, and incredibly eager for publicity.

Tusker

Humanoid, with silver-gray fur, amber eyes, and huge teeth; 8'4", 450 lbs.

ST 18; DX 12/19; IQ 11; HT 12/22. Move 6

Advantages: Amphibious; Cast Iron Stomach; DR +2; Extra Hit Points +10; Fur, Thick; Infravision; Nictating Membrane/1; Oxygen Storage; Teeth (male has Fangs, 1d imp.; female, sharp teeth, 1d cut); Temperature Tolerance +1.

Disadvantages: Illiterate; Inconvenient size; Increased Life Support/1; Primitive (TL0); Reduced Manual Dexterity/3; Short Lifespan/1; Sleepy/1; Uneducated.

Quirks: Not scared of heights, but hate flying.

Skills: Armoury/TL0 (Stone Knapping)-10; Brawling-12; Breath Control-10; Climbing-12; Gesture-10; Knife-12; Language (Tusker)-11; Running-10; Singing-10; Stealth-9; Swimming-14; Survival (Arctic, Fresh water)-12; Tracking-11.

Gear: Horn dagger (thr -1 imp; Reach C,1; max damage 1d+1); Hand axe (sw-1 cut; reach C; Min ST 12). Both use knife skill; neither can be used to parry.

Though fearsome-looking, and with only a primitive and pre-literate technology, Tuskers are intelligent omnivorous creatures who will only attack humans in self-defense. They are native to a .9G Terrestrial world with a 76% nitrogen/23% oxygen atmosphere at .88 Earth-normal pressure, minor seasonal effects, and most comfortable at temperatures around 40 degrees. Their favorite food is fish, but they also eat plants, carrion, eggs, mollusks, and assorted creepy-crawlies. There are no birds or other flying creatures on their world, and the thought of flight is likely

to terrify them.

Designer's Notes: GURPS Character Builder

by Bruce Kvam

I discovered *GURPS* back in 1989. I'd been playing that other game system, but was tired of the arbitrary limitations and the same old dungeon crawls. I got hold of *GURPS Basic Set* and *GURPS Cliffhangers* and embarked on a pulp campaign redolent of the *Indiana Jones* movies.

One problem, though, was the time involved in creating balanced characters. As a GM, I created a lot of non-player characters and it took hours to get them just right. Yeah, I could have just slapped down a bunch of numbers and not bothered to add them up. But I've always been a by-the-rules kind of guy. It only seemed fair for the GM to play under the same constraints as the players.

Being a professional programmer, I wrote a DOS application that created *GURPS* characters. When I started using Windows, a complete redesign from the ground up was in order.

The primary design consideration was to make the character creation process be driven by the data, rather than the application. This would allow creation of new types of advantages, skills, and powers without having to change the application.

A second, less obvious, implication was that other game systems could be supported. Taking a cue from *GURPS*, the design was generic, allowing the application to encompass other systems, eventually including *Fudge*, *CORPS*, *the Hero System*, *Fuzion*, *Call of Cthulhu*, *Legend of the Five Rings*, *Sengoku* and others.

Character Builder Features

Character Builder creates characters from the character templates in *GURPS Wizards* and *GURPS Warriors*, or from completely from scratch. Characters are based on character sheet templates, which provide a starting point for the character: the TL, beginning character points, other campaign limits, the data sheets that are loaded (essentially, which books you'll be using), etc. You can also make your own character sheet templates (which is the case for just about everything in *Character Builder*), setting your own initial TL, beginning points, maximum points in disadvantages, even the initial window layout.

As you change your character's attributes, the character point totals are automatically updated to reflect the cost. Skills whose levels depend on those attributes are also changed; during character creation, skill costs are adjusted automatically to keep the level constant (if possible). Totals are immediately updated.

When you indicate a skill is based on the default, the highest value is taken, be it a default based on a specific skill, an attribute, or an entire category of skills.

When you add an advantage that gives a bonus to a skill, the skill's cost is reduced to account for the bonus; if the skill's level is reduced below the minimum allowed, the level is set to that minimum. The original value is remembered, however, so if you crank IQ up to 17 just to see what happens, *Character Builder* will reset the skill levels to the original values when you bring IQ back down to 12.

Character Builder performs semi-automatic spell prerequisite satisfaction. For example, if you pick the Deathtouch spell, the application tells you that Wither Limb is required. If you tell the application to satisfy that requirement, it tells you that Magery 2 is required. After you pick the desired type of Magery, it tells you that Paralyze Limb requires five Body Control spells. If you pick Balance, the application will automatically add the spells required for Balance (which successively require Boost Dexterity, Dexterity, Clumsiness, Spasm, and Itch), which also happen to satisfy the five-spell requirement for Paralyze Limb. You only need to pick a few spells and the application will do a lot of the grunt work for you.

The same requirements mechanism is used for skill prerequisites and conflicting advantages and disadvantages (such as the same character having both an Appearance advantage and disadvantage).

Character Builder also implements selection rules; these suppress the display of skills and equipment that are above the character's TL so that you don't have to wade through the Astrogation and Beam Weapons skills when you're creating a medieval character. You can always turn these rules off with a click of a checkbox to see everything that's available.

If your campaign doesn't enforce all the standard **GURPS** rules, you can turn off the requirements and warnings.

And for busy GMs who need a couple of quick NPCs, you can put the Generate Character script on autopilot and have it generate a character randomly. Usually I despise random characters, but since this is template-driven, there's a lot less cleanup required than for typical randomly generated characters.

What's All in Character Builder?

GURPS Character Builder is big. It includes the data from **GURPS Basic Set**, **GURPS Magic**, **GURPS Supers**, **GURPS Grimoire**, **GURPS Martial Arts**, **GURPS Compendium I**, **GURPS Psionics**, **GURPS Wizards**, and **GURPS Warriors**. This all adds up to about 800 skills and maneuvers, 60 martial arts styles, 1000 spells, 500 advantages, 300 disadvantages, 160 powers, and 400 items of equipment.

There are about 200 high-resolution character art images, including 36 character outlines that you can base your own character pictures on, and 160 complete character illustrations from many **GURPS** books and other sources. These illustrations are categorized by keywords that you can search on (and you can add your own images and descriptions to the picture library).

There are four graphical character sheet print templates: the two-page **GURPS** character sheet, the one-page character sheet, the spell grimoire, and the martial arts record sheet. You can also create your own (see below).

Using text filters you can print out three different types of GM Control sheets with combat information for multiple characters. This and other character information can be put into RTF (Rich Text Format) files that can be edited further by word processing applications. Similar text filters can be used to copy character descriptions in three different styles (including the standard SJ Games character description style) to the clipboard for incorporation of character writeups into word processing documents.

There are three special commands, including a "finalize character" command (prepares your character for post-creation attribute costs and skill level rules), a "generate character" command (creates a character from a character template and optionally generates a random appearance and selects random advantages, skills and disadvantages according to the template), and a "character optimization" command that finds the values of IQ and DX that produce the lowest character cost.

There's a die roller (which is customizable -- you can associate any die rolls you want with the buttons) and a name finder (which lets you search a database of thousands of names, many categorized by sex and ethnicity).

Finally, there's a collection of useful **GURPS** PDF files, including several different character sheets, spells summaries, various campaign sheets, hex grids and other forms.

Customization and House Rules

There are several built-in customization and configuration features, including setting the cost of extra fatigue and hit points, converting adds to dice, the Enhanced ST rule and basing Fatigue on HT and Hits on ST. You can also change the costs of most standard items to match the requirements of your own campaign, or modify "generic" skills and advantages to create one-shot specials.

You can create your own data sheets to add campaign-specific skills, advantages and disadvantages. How hard is it to do this? Well, like everything, if what you're trying to model is simple, the solution is simple. If it's hard, the solution is hard.

Let's say your Old West campaign needs a Calf-Roping skill, a PA skill that defaults to DX-5 and requires Riding and Animal Handling. The following shows how this skill would be entered in the data sheet (you enter the data on the second line):

Macro	name	class	cat	def	prereq
skill	Calf-Roping	PA	Animal	DX-5	Riding>=12;Animal Handling>=12

Data entry is accomplished through a spreadsheet-like interface, with rows and columns. You simply enter data in one column and tab to the next.

Advantages, disadvantages, spells, weapons, equipment, etc., are entered in a similar fashion. The most complicated items to create are the character templates, because of specializations, variations based on TL and the like.

The character finalization, generation and optimization commands are examples of character sheet automation: scripts that directly manipulate the character sheet. Character Builder has a script programming language allows you to change values in the character sheet, add skills, set options on advantages, etc.

The ability to customize doesn't end there, however. *Character Builder's* multi-system heritage remains intact. The application provides all the tools to create custom *GURPS* character sheet and print templates; if you don't like the way the standard printed character sheet is laid out, or it's missing some data that you want to include, you can create your own print template.

Character Builder can also create completely new game systems. Scripts can be written to convert characters from one game system to another.

The Guts

Internally, the application is based on an expression evaluation engine that "notifies" a component of the character sheet (an item in the skill list, an attribute in the Main dialog, an active defense value displayed in the Combat dialog, etc.) when the variable associated with that component is changed.

For example, when you change your character's IQ, all skills that reference the IQ variable (or reference another variable that references IQ) are reevaluated and their new costs displayed. This is similar to the way spreadsheets work, but instead of cell references, *Character Builder* uses named variables. The result is that skills that don't depend on IQ won't be updated, giving faster response time.

Similarly, if you change the level of Magery all spell costs are reevaluated and displayed. Changing ST will cause hand weapons to be reevaluated and the new damage value displayed. If Fatigue is left "floating" (defaulting to ST), Fatigue will also automatically track ST. When you increase Linguistics, all language skill costs are reevaluated for the Linguistics bonus.

Finally -- and I'm not really sure why people always ask this -- the application is written in C++.

New Monk Weapons and Feats for d20

by Sean Robson

I was always a great fan of the monk character class in AD&D, and contrary to purists who argued that they had no place in a medieval fantasy setting, I felt that the exotic flavor of asian culture fit perfectly into a High Fantasy setting. So I was very pleased to find that monks had been included in the *Dungeons & Dragons 3rd Edition Player's Handbook*, and was generally very satisfied with how they had been handled. The only detail of the class that I found irksome was the inclusion of "special monk weapons" that were anything but special. As they all deal the 1d6 damage and, despite being exotic weapons, have no special abilities; there is almost no reason for a monk to ever use them. Since after 3rd level, monks do more damage with their bare hands, the only conceivable reason to use one were if it were magic. My hope that *Sword and Fist*, the guidebook to fighters and monks, would rectify this was in vain. The supplement added one special monk weapon, the Three-section staff, which deals 1d8 damage, has no special abilities, and requires the monk to purchase Exotic Weapon Proficiency. Ho hum.

All other exotic weapons in the game have some special ability, and the special monk weapons should be no different. In addition to revising existing weapons from the *Player's Handbook* and *Sword and Fist*, this rule variant adds a few common Okinawan kobudo weapons. The special abilities were selected for balance, playability, and fun rather than realism. By selecting complimentary feats the monk can become very effective with his weapon of choice, making the Weapon Master prestige class more attractive. Several of the new weapons were described in Steve Honeywell's article "[What's That You're Carrying? Exotic Weapons for d20.](#)" but are presented differently here. This list does not even begin to touch upon the long list of martial arts weapons from China and other countries. DMs who want a larger selection of martial arts weapons can easily create their own using the weapons described here as a guide.

In addition to weapons, three new feats are included, which reflect abilities common to all skilled martial artists.

Weapon Descriptions

All weapons described below are considered to be special monk weapons, and when using them a monk can strike with his unarmed base attack, including his more favorable number of attacks per round. Monks are automatically proficient in all special monk weapons except the three-section staff, kusari, and kusari-gama. Due to the improved effectiveness of the exotic special monk weapons, however, DMs might require monk characters to purchase an exotic weapon proficiency in order to use the weapon's special ability.

Simple Weapons -- Melee

Weapon	Cost	Damage	Critical	Range Increment	Weight	Type
Medium						
Jo Staff	-	1d6	x2	10 ft.	2 lb	Bludgeoning
Large						
Bo Staff	-	1d6/1d6	x2	-	4 lb	Bludgeoning

Exotic Weapons -- Melee

Weapon	Cost	Damage	Critical	Range Increment	Weight	Type
Small						
Kama	2 gp	1d6	18-20/x2	-	2 lb	Slashing
Nunchaku	2 gp	1d6	x2	-	2 lb	Bludgeoning
Sai	4 gp	1d4	19-20/x2	-	1 lb	Piercing
Siangham	3 gp	1d6	x3	10 ft.	1 lb	Piercing

Tonfa	1 gp	1d6	x2	-	2 lb	Bludgeoning
Large Kusari	8 gp	1d8	x2	-	5 lb	Bludgeoning
Kusari-gama	10 gp	1d6	18-20/x2	-	5 lb	Slashing
Three-section staff	4 gp	1d8	x3	-	8 lb	Bludgeoning

Bo staff: For all practical purposes, this is a quarterstaff. It is a fundamental weapon that is taught in many martial arts styles and should be considered a special monk weapon. The Bo staff is a double weapon. You can fight with it as if fighting with two weapons, but if you do, you incur all the normal attack penalties associated with fighting with two weapons as if using a one-handed weapon and a light weapon.

Jo staff: This is a shorter version of the Bo staff and may be used either one or two-handed. It is similar to the Philippine escrima stick, and is treated here as a club.

Kama: The critical range of the kama has been increased to 18-20.

Kusari: A kusari is a 10-12 foot length of chain with weighted ends. This is a two-handed weapon: one hand is used to hold the chain, while the other whirls and throws the weighted end. The kusari has a reach of 10 feet, but can also be shortened up to strike adjacent foes. You get a +2 bonus on your opposed roll when attempting to disarm or trip an opponent. If you are tripped during your own trip attempt, you may drop the kusari instead of being tripped. The Kusari is very difficult to use, and monks must purchase Exotic Weapon Proficiency to use it.

Kusari-gama: The kusari-gama is a sickle with a length of weighted chain attached to the end of the shaft. It is a two-handed weapon: one hand holds and throws the chain; the other holds the sickle. You get a +2 bonus on your opposed roll when attempting to disarm an opponent. The kusari-gama may be used to make trip attacks. If you are tripped during your own trip attempt, you may drop the kusari-gama instead of being tripped. This is not considered a double weapon. Monks are required to purchase Exotic Weapon Proficiency to use the kusari-gama.

Nunchaku: Since whirling nunchaku's can strike out quickly in any direction, you may make an extra attack of opportunity once per turn. This ability stacks with Combat Reflexes.

Sai: The sai is a small forked baton about the size of a dagger, with either a blunt or sharpened point. The tines, which extend from the handle, are used to catch an opponent's weapon and disarm him. The sai confers a +3 bonus on your opposed attack roll to disarm your opponent.

Three-section staff: This weapon consists of three sections of wood of equal length, connected with chain or rope. This very versatile weapon can be wielded in a variety of ways: with all sections extended, or with one or both sections folded over the center section. The three-section staff has reach and may strike opponents 10 feet away. It may also be used against adjacent foes without penalty. Alternatively, it can be held by the middle section, using both end sections as flails. When used in such a manner, the three-section staff is considered to be a dual weapon. You can fight with it as if fighting with two weapons, but if you do, you incur all the normal attack penalties associated with fighting with two weapons as if using a one-handed weapon and a light weapon. The three-section staff is a very difficult weapon to use, and monks must purchase Exotic Weapon Proficiency to use it.

Tonfa: The tonfa is a two foot long hardwood shaft with a handle set at right angles near one end. The tonfa is held by the handle, with the shaft lying along the outside of the forearm, and the other end extending beyond the fist. The tonfa is extremely effective when blocking. If you choose to fight defensively with the tonfa, you receive an additional +2 dodge bonus to AC. This stacks with the normal +2 bonus for fighting defensively, or with the bonus for Expertise.

Siangham: Although not normally an effective ranged weapon, trained practitioners (who have purchased Exotic Weapon Proficiency) may throw the siangham with a range increment of 10 feet. This is not a realistic rule, and DM's wishing to run a realistic historical campaign may wish to disregard it.

New Feats

IMPROVED GRAPPLE [General]

You are adept at applying arm locks and choke holds to incapacitate your foe.

Prerequisites: Improved unarmed strike, Int 13+

Benefit: You receive +2 attack bonus to grapple checks. Note: monks may deal either normal or subdual damage after a successful grapple attack.

KIAI [General]

You may initiate an attack with a blood-curdling scream of focussed ki.

Prerequisites: Improved unarmed strike, Stunning fist

Benefit: Declare that you are attacking with kiai before you make your attack roll. Your foe must make a Willpower saving throw (DC 10 + 1/2 attacker's level + attacker's Wis modifier) to avoid being surprised. If your opponent fails he is caught flat-footed and loses his Dexterity bonus to AC vs. the attack. Kiai may be used once per day per character level.

STABLE STANCE [General]

You fight in a broad, stable stance, which makes it difficult for opponents to budge you.

Prerequisite: Base attack bonus +3

Benefit: You gain +3 bonus to opposed checks when defending against trip and bull rush attacks. This bonus may also be applied to your opposed Strength check to trip an opponent who has failed to trip you.

Death, Where Is Thy Sting?

by James Alan Gardner

Some years ago, I ran a campaign in which the characters played gods . . . literally. They were Earthlings conscripted by aliens to form a pantheon similar to the Greeks' Mount Olympus; for reasons too convoluted to explain here, the aliens gave the players divine powers and sent them to lord it over the primitive inhabitants of a planet that had no indigenous religion.

The distinctive thing about this campaign was the vast difference in power between the players and the NPCs. The natives had only reached the Bronze Age; the players were so bio-augmented, they could hardly be scratched by the crude weapons of the locals. The NPCs didn't even have magic or psionics. In essence, the players had nothing to fear but each other . . . and there was no particular incentive for them to fight among themselves.

The result was a campaign in which it was practically impossible for the player characters to die, even by their own gross stupidity; and it was one of the best campaigns I've ever run. Safe from lethal repercussions, the players were free to roleplay. (Amazing!) I seldom prepared encounters in advance; the players were more than capable of getting into trouble on their own, embarking on pet projects to stop local wars, introduce "civilization," and so on.

After a few months, I made the mistake of introducing a second pantheon of equal power level, created by the same aliens as part of an overall scheme. Immediately, the tone of the campaign changed. With real threats on the horizon, the freewheeling action ended and a more conservative style took hold. The players would spend whole evenings just talking, making plans, second-guessing themselves, getting nothing accomplished. The sense of fun vanished. Instead of memorable exploits, we had planning sessions that often went nowhere. Ho hum.

So I let my players wipe out the other pantheon with relative ease. As soon as the real danger was eliminated, the fun and risk-taking started again.

In time the campaign ended, and the group started with a different set of characters in a completely different setting . . . but I decided to preserve one principle from the "Gods" campaign: I told the players that no matter what their characters did, they wouldn't die unless the player explicitly asked me to kill the character off.

The second campaign went just as well as the first, even though there was no huge power differential this time -- the PCs had no substantial advantage over the NPCs and death was a real possibility. I just refused to let it happen.

As before, the players threw themselves into the action wholeheartedly. They took chances; they got into trouble; they actually played their characters, as opposed to careful plodders afraid to do the wrong thing.

Of course, there were still consequences: they got captured a few times and put to work as slaves; innocents were occasionally killed because of the players' rashness; one character got impregnated with a demon, and another became a vampire. Even so, they had a whale of a time because of the simple assurance that their characters would never be permanently removed from play.

Since then, I've adopted the "nobody dies" policy in every campaign I run. It liberates the players . . . and it makes them more equal partners in the game, proactively initiating events rather than waiting for the GM to create something. All the GM has to do is give the players a reason for wanting to act; after that, they do all the work.

Of course, the GM is forced to improvise like a maniac. When players feel free to make their own choices, you have to deal with often irrational results. But that just means the GM gets to have the same kind of fun as the players-- winging it as you go along, wracking your brain for smooth responses and pretending you planned everything all along.

Improvisation is particularly important when a player gets too cocky and steps into a hornets' nest. The "no death"

policy doesn't prevent a character's hit points from dropping below zero (or whatever the lethal number is); when that happens, you just have to cope. I've done all of the following (entirely on the spur of the moment):

- The character dies. I say, "You lie still for a moment of utter blackness . . . then suddenly you gasp and sit up. Your wounds have miraculously healed." Yes--completely off the cuff, I decided the character was a Highlander- style immortal. My oh my, did that change the nature of the campaign!
- The character entered the afterlife. Adventures ensued in heaven and hell till the character could work out a resurrection deal with a cranky Death God.
- The character became a ghost. It took a while to get the game balance right, since ghosts have some major advantages over living characters; still, with a bit of tinkering, I managed to bring the character into line with the power level of the other PCs.
- And my favorite (in a *Dungeons & Dragons* campaign): a character died and a terrible idea popped into my head. Before I got cold feet, I announced, "Too bad -- you're toast. Friend Computer activates your next clone which is already dressed in appropriate medieval attire. A door opens in the hillside close to your party and you're sent out to resume your mission." You'll never look at the Forgotten Realms the same way once you realize the Underdark is Alpha Complex . . . and once again, the campaign reeled in wildly unforeseen ways.

I admit the "no death" idea doesn't fit with some types of campaign -- what would *Call of Cthulhu* be without investigators regularly getting reduced to mulch? But if GMs try "no deaths," I think they'll be pleasantly surprised; they're likely to get more player participation and more memorable scenes, because the PCs aren't so afraid to open the locked door or press the big red button. You may think your players would take terrible advantage of such immortality . . . well, they do, but that's the whole point. Let them start propelling the action rather than reining them in.

And the best part? When they *do* mess up through their own stupidity, they're still alive to suffer the consequences. Heh, heh.

Success, The Future, and Other Uncertainties

[Two weeks ago](#) I talked about how computers and technology have changed much of our gaming. Going back to that column, and in honor of the annual tradition of New Year's pontification, I'd like to share some of my observations (he said, dipping into the Great Karnac envelopes).

Anyway, over on various message boards I've been reading industry types theorize hypothetical "mass market games." Y'know . . . those games that are so good the Teeming Millions are kicking down your doors, chanting your game's name, and shipping crateloads of gold bullion to your offices.

(As an aside, I just had a vision of marketing a jar of small gold cubes, and marketing them as "Gold Bullion Cubes . . . just add water!" But I digress.)

Anyway, there has been some theorizing about what, exactly, such a game would contain. In the midst of this discussion I pointed out that there have been some games that, if not mass-market successes, have been more successful than most RPGs. Here were some that came to mind that seemed to have ties to roleplaying games.

1. **Talisman.** This board game (called by a friend the "*Monopoly* of Fantasy Gaming") consists of moving a character around a board, drawing cards that represent items of power, and killing evil creatures. This game has many of the elements of most roleplaying games intrinsically: a combat system, an experience/advancement system, "movement" rules, etc. In addition, it encourages roleplaying itself (at least, it always has when I've played it); many times my friends and I played and someone would say something like, "The Druid, seeing the weakness of Good, rejects that path to choose Evil . . . and seals his dark pact by claiming the Doomsword! Bwah-hah-hah . . ."
2. [Fighting Fantasy/Lone Wolf](#) books. Again, these have many of the elements of roleplaying: character creation/development, a combat system, etc. And some of them -- like the *Sorcery!* series -- have continuing epic stories and interesting character interaction.
3. **How to Host a Murder.** This game consists of players taking the roles of people on the scene of a murder (in a live-action kind of way), who must then interrogate each other, interpret clues, and reveal their own tidbits of information. In my mind these games are the easiest way to trick someone into participating in a live-action roleplaying game. These games have many roleplaying elements: story elements, character immersion, plots, etc., were found in Toys-R-Us, and probably had many players who would never get near a game store.
4. *A Question of Scruples.* For those of you who don't remember, this board game came out several years ago. In it you drew cards with moral or theoretical yes/no questions on it ("Would you want to know the exact day you'd die?", "If you saw a rich-looking man drop a wad of money and walk away, would you return it?"), and asked your fellow players, where you'd try to guess how they would answer. (I seem to remember are other book-based "games" that continue on in this tradition.) Fairly popular at the time, I consider this game to have many elements in common with RPGs; really, I consider a question like, "Would you donate your organs after you die, knowing that one of them would to an evil person?" to be very close, mentally, to "Does your priest use his powers to keep an evil person alive, knowing that person will still be useful to you and your epic quest?"

Okay; having mentioned these products, what elements do they have in common?

- *No GMs.* Even in the *Host a Murder* series, the "Host" can still play the game, and still has the ability to be surprised/amazed/pleased with the game. No one needs to assume a position of power.
- *No preparation time.* The one that has the longest preparation time is, again, *Host a Murder*. And even the game portion of that event is relatively quick: in essence, read through the characters, pick friends who would be suited to each role, mail invitations. (Of course, how long the host spends planning a period-piece meal, finding music, straightening the house, etc. is another matter . . .)
- *Minimal involvement necessary.* In other words, the minimal amount necessary to "play" is *very* little in these games. *Talisman?* Roll dice; draw cards; do what they tell you. *How to Host a Murder?* Reveal the five plot elements the sheet tells you to. Think about the mystery (or don't). *A Question of Scruples?* You can sit on the couch like a lump and say, "No. Yes. Yes. No. Maybe." to five questions. Of course, most of these games *can*

give more back the more the players put into it; the *Talisman* character who revels in being the Boar-killing Toad, the *Scruples* player who takes the opportunity to learn more about his friends (and himself), the *Host a Murder* player who makes up his own song and saying about the R.A.F. (er, not that I'm speaking from experience or anything . . .)

In my mind, this is important; I've seen too many roleplaying games ruined -- or at least dampened -- because one of the players wasn't as enthusiastic as the others. ("Your character is charged with **murder!!!** What do you do?" "Nothin'. Hide, I guess. Turn the TV down low. Don't watch *Cops*.")

Now, I began this column talking about technology, and took a left on I-10 to digress about "mass-market games." But my off-ramp is coming up here soon . . .

Anyway, I suspect many people are thinking, "But Steven . . . the games you mentioned don't really have anything to do with roleplaying!") And that may well be . . . currently. But to tie it all together, I'd point out that, with the event of technology and the relentless progression of time (see? I'm even tying it back to the New Year!), our games continue to evolve and morph. And when I look at games like [The Adventures of Baron Munchausen](#), *Vampire: The Masquerade Revised*, and *Rune*, I realize how far removed and different they look from the modified tactical miniatures rules that first became the original *Dungeons & Dragons* game. And I can't help but wonder whether what we call "roleplaying" games 20 years from now will resemble what we currently play and love, and whether or not we've found that elusive "mass market" success that many companies crave. But I do feel confident that the core of roleplaying will survive, in some form, long into the future.

Now all we need to do is figure out what the core of roleplaying *is* . . .

* * *

For the first time in a long time I've had a mini-computer crash. As a result I've lost most email written to me between December 21st and December 26th (inclusive). Fortunately I picked a good time to have problems; most folks seemed to be doing other things during that time, so my email volume was pretty low.

Still, if you wrote me during that time, you may want to [write back](#).

And if you haven't written me, yet wished to, you can rectify this now. In fact, you can *say* you wrote during that time, and I won't be any the wiser!

Isn't technology great?

--*Steven Marsh*

* * *

Last week's answer: Middle Earth: The Wizards

(*Four stars*)

"Nervous about our presentation to the board, Egbert?"

"I'll say, Sally! . . . I heard that the board of directors is made up of a bunch of soulless monsters!"

"Golly!"

". . . Well, that's a relief! They look just like the rest of management!"

Pyramid Review

The Grande Temple of Jing (for d20)

Published by [Hammerdog Games](#)

Written by Danny O'Neill

Illustrated by Ralph Horsley

40 pages; \$8.95

The year 2001 has seen a great many new publishers and titles, most invariably for the *d20* system. A case could be made that there are too many of both, but the numbers keep growing... This leaves the potential buyer with a glut to wade through in search of, if not the new, certainly the good, the different, or at least the interesting. New Canadian/American publisher Hammerdog Games enters the *d20* new list with something that is different -- at least in terms of format. Their first batch of releases consists of two titles: *BBA #1.1 The Grande Temple of Jing Part I: A Balance of Power* and *BBA #2.1 Assault on Darkspyre*. It is the first of these releases that is reviewed here.

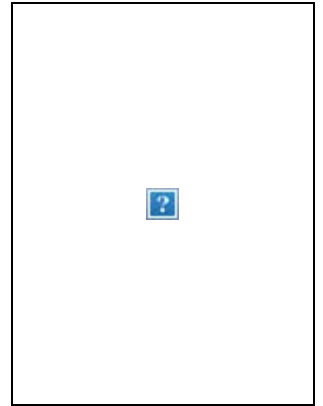
The Grande Temple of Jing at first seems to be a standard A5 format book, but looks can be deceiving. Behind Ralph Horsley's excellent cover, the reader needs to turn the book from the standard portrait (vertical) format to landscape (horizontal) format to properly read it. The book is text-heavy, with just a single piece of art that is not so much thumbnail-size as little fingernail. The fact that art only appears once in the book -- and is then done too small -- is rather disappointing. The maps have been created by Danny O'Neill and his dungeon map in the centre of the book is easy to read, but perhaps a little brash and busy upon the eye. Of course, using *Campaign Cartographer 2* means that the maps can be done with a certain degree of preciseness.

Nothing all that new so far, but Hammerdog Games have designed *Grande Temple of Jing* as a "Building Block Adventure" -- this is what the BBA stands for. Essentially this means that the adventure can be played or adapted to any setting. This sounds much like any other adventure, but Hammerdog have gone a little further. *Grande Temple of Jing* is intentionally written to allow the GM to get the characters into and out of the dungeon itself. That "feature" is a result of the plot, which I'll come to later. The Open Gaming Licence portions of the adventure are well organised and are placed into "ABC's" or Adventure Block Cards. Each ABC contains a new monster, magical item or a particular table. Throughout the adventures the ABCs are referenced and because they are placed at either the beginning or end of the book, they are quick and easy to find and use.

Besides the main map at the center of the book, each room description is accompanied by a portion of the main map particular to just that room. This is good use of *Campaign Cartographer 2*, let down only by the fact that the map sections showing multiple rooms are not marked with their room numbers. Yet using *Campaign Cartographer 2* in this way is not the most significant design feature introduced in *Grande Temple of Jing*. This is the sidebar that runs down the left hand side of the page and contains icons that explain the details of the room at a glance. These icons fall into two types -- those that become standard throughout the adventure and those are particular to an individual room.

All of these features make *Grande Temple of Jing* quick and easy to use. In fact the "room at a glance" sidebar explanations are a superb design feature -- Hammerdog deserves our praise for those alone. If I have one complaint about the presentation, it is that this all feels a bit too cramped. Reformatting the book to a standard A4 size might make the book a little easier to read and the publishers might want to consider this when they begin a new series of adventures.

[SPOILER ALERT]



And so to the adventure itself . . . Designed for a party of low-level characters, ideally of second level, the default setting is Hammerdog's Magical world of Denoa. This can be downloaded from the publisher's website, as well as extra ABCs and an additional adventure. Whilst in the Greenspan Forest, the party joins in the search for a pair of Elven hunting groups. Almost *Ravenloft*-like, the characters find themselves enveloped in a thick white mist, but instead of being transported to the Land Of Horror, they find themselves in a dungeon. This is in fact the grand temple of the title and the creation of the forgotten deity Jing.

Jing is in fact a trickster god, known by many names in various different lands, but specifically Jing in Denoa. Revered by many as the bringer of fire and tools, the temple is his plaything. The capricious nature of Jing shows through in his temple design. Puzzles reset themselves at the beginning of each day; levers and particular conditions operate doors between the sections; and throughout the temple there are sculptures of Jing with this hand held out. If the player characters place coins, gems, or magical items upon the hand, the god accepts their donations, and in return the characters receive experience points!

Once they have gained Jing's favor, the god will not only grant them magical items -- though these do come with built in flaws as well -- but also quests to undertake throughout the level of the dungeon and the levels that Hammerdog will detail in future releases. In *Grande Temple of Jing*, some of these quests actually include locating the Elven hunting parties. As quests are completed, Jing will actually allow adventurers to leave his temple, but just as with *Ravenloft* and *The Godfather Part II*, his favored adventurers are sure to be drawn back in... In the meantime, the GM is free to run other adventures for his players.

The dungeon is designed with some thought given to its ecology, with Jing orchestrating the situation so that there is enough food available for all, but everyone is still left hungry. This delicate balance can be easily upset should some factor intervene -- say a resourceful group of player characters. The opposition described herein is one tribe of kobolds who worship and gain the favour of Jing, and a second of Orcs who revile and desecrate the statues of Jing, gaining his disfavour. The party will find that they can gain a position of power over the kobolds and thus have a base of operations for later excursions into the dungeon.

[END SPOILER ALERT]

This adventure is fun and its design contains some clever and innovative features. These make the adventure very easy for the referee to use and Hammerdog Games deserves praise for them. In future releases I would like to see more internal art and the books reformatted to a standard size, but otherwise *Grande Temple of Jing* is a rather good first release.

The Grande Temple of Jing is an unrepentant dungeon bash, but one that has been written with a knowing sense of humour. Within such a framework it works rather well and allows the referee to roleplay the capricious whimsies of the god Jing.

(Or should that be "Kerr-ching!!" followed by an evil laugh all the way to the bank?)

--Matthew Pook

[with thanks to Roj at Wayland's Forge]